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ABSTRACT

This volume is intended to introduce college teachers of English as a second language (ESL) to some of the basic concepts underlying the teaching of English in India. A theoretical framework is formulated within which problems such as the planning of syllabuses and designing of courses and tests may be understood. At the same time, practical suggestions are offered to the classroom teacher, who will benefit from insights made available by recent advances in the language sciences and psychology. Eighteen chapters cover principles of first and second language acquisition, English usage, curricula and course design, basic concerns of ESL teachers, teaching strategies, testing, and individual language skills (reading of prose and poetry, grammar, and composition). (Author/JB)

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INTRODUCTIONS
TO
ENGLISH LANGUAGE
TEACHING

Volume 3
Methods at the College Level

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PREFACE

This series of books is intended to introduce university and college teachers of English to some of the basic concepts underlying the teaching of English in India. It is based on courses given at the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages, Hyderabad. It is hoped that it will provide an essential foundation for language teachers and encourage them to consult more specialized works on particular aspects.

The present volume attempts to formulate a theoretical framework within which the important problems encountered in teaching English, such as the planning of syllabuses and the designing of courses and tests, may be viewed and understood. At the same time, it aims at offering practical help to the teacher in the classroom who will benefit from the insights made available by recent advances in the language sciences and psychology.

This volume is the third in the series. The two other volumes already published deal with linguistics, and phonetics and spoken English. Further volumes in the series will deal with other areas like teaching materials and the interpretation of literature.

Ramesh Mohan

Director

Hyderabad

June 1977

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of a methodology for teaching at the college level is still novel enough to call for a word of introduction. Some people would question the need for methodology at this level. Their feeling is: 'If the teacher knows *what* to teach, methods can take care of themselves.'

The plain fact is that today's student is unwilling to accept everything that we might wish to offer him as part of his education. If we want him to co-operate, we should be able to meet him at least half-way: to understand his problems, which are very real, and to try to give him what he needs, rather than what we think he should have. This is, basically, a problem of human communication. The channels seem to have clogged, and they must be restored before the 'message' can be sent across.

Methodology is not concerned only with creating the willingness to learn. Everything that happens in connection with learning and teaching has to be accounted for. One of the characteristics of a technological society is its fascination with underlying systems and processes. We are not content with observing and recording; we insist on taking things apart, to see how they work.

What, exactly, goes into the making of a good teacher? There are those who maintain that the teacher, like the poet, is born, not made. This may be largely true; and yet, good teaching should be reproducible, communicable. We need a model which may be used in designing other teachers.

Methodology involves the analysis of all the systems that operate in making teaching and learning possible. There are a large number of factors to be considered, but they are, chiefly:

- 1 the nature of what has to be taught—the 'content';
- 2 the nature of learning—the factors responsible for learning;
- 3 the nature of the circumstances in which learning has to take place: the student, the teacher and the environment—the 'context'.

A thorough analysis would require more space than it is possible to devote here, but an attempt has been made to relate the process of teaching and learning to a specific 'content' (English, as a language), and a specific set of circumstances (those obtaining in India

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today). This is something which pedagogy neglects to do sometimes. In our analysis we have begun with the last variable—the context of teaching, on which everything really depends. The context helps us to define our objectives, and our choice of ‘content’ depends on what we feel to be relevant to the context. Specifically, we have to consider here the curricula which are most suited to our present needs; the kinds of ‘materials’ (texts, tests, etc.) which we could use to provide the related learning experiences; and finally, the kinds of techniques which could be used to make learning effective.

Teaching methods have two aspects: the theoretical, derived from the related disciplines of psychology, sociology and, in the case of English, linguistics; the practical, devoted to the actual teaching ‘skills’ to be developed.

Theory is important because it provides a rationale for whatever practices one wishes to advocate, but what matters ultimately is the results it can lead to. One of the major factors in successful learning is the teacher. The knowledge which he brings to the situation, the extent and nature of his experience, and the personality traits and teaching skills that he possesses are all crucial for any teaching ‘method’. Many of these can be significantly influenced through training.

This book is not intended to be a substitute for professional training, but we hope it will give teachers an increased awareness of the main issues involved in teaching English at the college level.

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PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS FOR THE TEACHER OF ENGLISH

Anyone who has had to teach English in a college class recognizes only too well the problems that face him. Among them are:

- 1 large, frequently unmanageable, numbers of students;
- 2 the poor standards in English of the students;
- 3 the lack of interest in English, sometimes bordering on hostility;
- 4 the heavy burden of an unrealistic syllabus;
- 5 the sheer difficulty, for most students, in understanding the prescribed texts;
- 6 the unsuitability of most of these texts for the purposes of teaching the language;
- 7 the lack of physical facilities which could make intensive teaching possible (e.g., smaller groups, libraries, language laboratories, etc.);
- 8 the outmoded system of examination which tests memory rather than control of language and makes it possible for students to 'pass' in English with the help of cribs, without having learnt the language.

All this has the effect of making the teacher and his efforts in the class somewhat irrelevant.

Many of these problems relate to matters of organization and administration over which the teacher may have little control. But the greatest difficulty is created by his failure to understand what exactly he is expected to do, what it is possible for him to achieve, and how he might go about it. It would be unfair, however, to blame the teacher for this. He is often picked raw from the university, armed with a textbook, pushed into the classroom and ordered to teach, without any orientation or training for the task. It is small wonder that most teachers become frustrated and even bitter.

The premium being placed currently on the teaching of English at the college level may be taken to indicate the following:

- 1 Whatever the attitudes to English might have been in the past,

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learning the language seems now to be a widely accepted objective.

2. *Some* proficiency in English is considered essential for higher professional and vocational education. Since the college (undergraduate) level is the transitional stage between school and university, it is important that the student be helped at this stage to acquire the English which he needs to continue his studies in any chosen field, of either a general or professional nature.
- 3 It is becoming increasingly difficult to provide the student with the required command of the language at the *school* level. Already, there are students who come to college with almost no command of English. In other cases, the length of prior exposure to English varies from three to six years, which does not make it easy to assume any common level for them. For practical purposes, the effective learning of English may well *begin* in college for many.

The deterioration in the teaching of English at the school level is another reason for emphasizing college-level teaching. The majority of teachers in schools are ill-equipped to teach English. Attempts are continually being made to improve their professional competence, but sheer numbers work against success. It may, however, be possible to achieve better results with teachers at the college level, since (i) there are fewer of them; (ii) they generally have the basic competence in English that teachers at the school level often lack; and (iii) they are required to teach *only* English—unlike the teachers in schools—and can be trained to become specialists.

But basically, the reason for insisting on more efficient teaching at the college level is that there seems to be a tendency, in some States, of delaying the teaching of English in schools. Pedagogically, it is better to start the teaching of languages early. Most experts recommend that the teaching of English should begin in the fifth or sixth class. But the different States, each with its own pattern of education, have different views on this. There are some which have decreed that the study of English be made optional at the school level. This does not, however, prevent the student from experiencing a need for English when he comes to college.

A generation ago, the teaching of English began early, and it was possible to devote considerable time to it. When English was the medium of instruction every student was exposed to it for several

hours a day—perhaps as much English was learnt in the Science or History class as in the English class. There was also greater exposure to the language outside the classroom. The school leaver was able to acquire a fairly efficient command of the language mainly because he was able to get the necessary practice. At the college stage all that had to be done was to expand and develop the base which had already been provided in school.

But conditions are different now. Students entering college fall far short of the standards expected of them. The college teacher now has to provide much of the elementary learning which should have taken place at school. Worse still, he has to wipe out the effects of bad learning which, if allowed to linger, would militate against further learning.

Clearly, the college teacher cannot do in a year or two everything that is supposed to be done in about six years at school. He cannot be expected to give all his students a thorough mastery of the English language. He has, therefore, to limit the scope of his teaching, to confine it to what is absolutely essential. If limited objectives are chosen it may be possible to produce *some* results.

The teaching of English in India has to be based on at least three sets of considerations: sociological, psychological and linguistic. The teacher of English must learn to view his work in the broader social perspective, to understand national objectives and commitments. He must also be able to assess individual needs, aspirations and difficulties, and view them with sympathy. It is important for the teacher to be able to identify himself with the student, not only in the mass but also at the personal, individual level. This is where an understanding of social as well as individual psychology will help. English teaching at the college level has gone wrong most in its disregard of the student.

There is one other readjustment that the teacher of English will have to make. He will have to contain his enthusiasm, or rather passion, for only 'the best that has been thought and written' in English, and take an interest in the more utilitarian forms and varieties of the language which may have greater relevance for his students. This interest in everyday language is not, as some students of literature seem to think, anti-intellectual. In fact, the language-literature controversy which has plagued discussions of English teaching is irrelevant and misleading. How else does one begin to understand and appreciate literature except through a keener

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perception of how language works? The disciplines of language study can help in developing this perception, and thus provide an additional tool for the serious student of literature.

For the teacher of language—any language—it is obviously essential to have an insight into the nature of language, into the relationship between language and other forms of human behaviour, the processes by which human beings learn language and develop their control of it, the relationships between different languages as well as within one language and so on. An understanding of these problems helps the teacher in seeing his objectives more clearly. Several of the fallacies persisting in language teaching are due to popular misconceptions about what language is.

The following chapters will be devoted to the analysis and explanation of some of the problems of which we have made a general survey here. We shall attempt to deal with these topics in not too technical a manner, though it may be necessary to use a few technical terms. It will also be necessary, perhaps, to repeat ourselves occasionally. We shall discuss the general principles first and then the particular and practical problems relating to English language teaching at the college level.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN TEACHING ENGLISH

'Teaching' does not consist only in what the teacher does in the classroom with his students. There are several factors to be taken into account when we talk about the teaching of something. Some of these are:

- 1 the curriculum;
- 2 the course;
- 3 the classroom techniques;
- 4 the system of evaluation.

Though the terms used above might look familiar, they will have to be clearly understood. The average teacher is usually concerned with only (3), and so he may perhaps be excused for thinking that this is all that 'teaching' involves.

The teacher in the classroom is certainly important; but there is someone who is even more important—the *learner*. It is the learner who is at the centre of the entire process of instruction. Books are written, teachers are employed and examinations are held only in order that the learner may learn. The teacher who cannot help the learner to learn has failed in his vocation.

The point needs to be emphasized because today there are college teachers of English who admit (though not in public) that they have stopped bothering about their students. The common experience is that students cannot understand their teacher. Even if the teacher wishes to communicate with them he cannot, because they are hopelessly below the minimum standards expected of them, and there are too many of them. And so the English class becomes a monologue, with the teacher as the performer and the students as bored observers.

To understand why this should have happened we need to go into some of the factors we have already mentioned. First, let us look at the effects of the curriculum.

The term 'curriculum' is sometimes understood to mean the list of subjects, topics, books, etc., which the student is expected to study. In fact, the term has a wider meaning. The framers of the curri-

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culum have the responsibility of defining completely the educational needs of the learner and identifying all the means whereby these needs can be fulfilled. In other words, the curriculum should provide a comprehensive plan on which the entire system of learning and teaching can be based.

Unfortunately, most curricula for English neglect to do this. The typical curriculum is nothing more than a list of topics and books for the examination. No attempt is made to relate the study of English to the actual needs of the learners.

Most people think the needs are so obvious that they do not have to be spelt out. But even if the needs are obvious, the correct strategy for satisfying them is not. It is this strategy that the curriculum should indicate. The task is far from simple.

The principles on which the curriculum ought to be planned and constructed should be understood by all teachers, even those who have nothing to do directly with the framing of the curriculum.

The 'curriculum' and the 'course' may be compared respectively to the doctor's diagnosis and the treatment he prescribes as a result of the diagnosis. (In fact, we do talk of the 'prescribed course of study!')

We have said that the object of 'teaching' is to produce 'learning'. One could describe 'learning' (briefly) as the change that takes place in the individual's behaviour or state of knowledge as a result of experience. Some experiences come to the individual as an inevitable part of the process of growing up. These are the 'natural' or universal experiences. There may be other experiences which the individual stumbles upon by chance, and these also produce some learning in him. Both these types of experience illustrate the process of 'self-learning'. In neither case are the experiences planned, selected, controlled or directed by any teacher. In teaching, however, we are concerned mainly with the pre-planned and directed experiences provided by a teacher in order to produce some desired results.

The ancient *gurus* provided their *shishyas* with such experience through discourses delivered orally. This is what the popular system of teaching through lectures is intended to do—though it is not always effective, as we shall see. But there are other means too: the reading of books, the viewing of pictures, the undertaking of 'tasks' which incorporate a particular kind of experience, etc. For effective learning, a variety of learning experiences is best.

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In the curriculum we should be able to visualize all the kinds of experiences that *may* be used in providing the desired learning, and the course enables us to arrange and organize these experiences for the learner.

Easily the most important of the experiences designed for learning is that provided through books, and so we tend to associate the course with a set of books, though there can be, and are, other media and materials serving the same purpose. The course includes all the resources which are employed in the implementation of the objectives stated in the curriculum. Any part of the course—any textbook, project or other material—serves as a tool, to be used by the teacher in providing the necessary learning experience.

The tendency at the college level is to rely mainly on literary texts. Books—of any kind—should constitute only a part of a language course, not the whole of it; a good course must be balanced. But when books *are* used, we must ensure that they are of the right sort, and have been carefully planned and written for the purpose for which they are being used. Judged by this criterion, most of the books used for teaching English at the college level are unsuitable.

Next, let us consider the effects of classroom techniques on learning English. The curriculum provides the blueprints and the course the tools to be used in teaching. But it is the teacher who has to make use of these tools. We would never allow a workman to handle a tool, such as a lathe, unless he had been trained to do it; but in our colleges we do not hesitate to put inadequate teaching tools into the hands of young teachers who have had no training whatsoever in their use and ask them to perform the most difficult of operations—teaching.

Our main purpose in this book is to indicate to the teacher how the tools may be sharpened and used to the best advantage, but first he has to understand the nature of the task and the nature of the tools. That is why we have said that it is futile to talk of classroom techniques in isolation from the other elements.

Everyone knows that the system of evaluation has its effects, too. The purpose of examinations, it would appear, is to provide young people with a certificate which will satisfy future employers about the quality of their minds. But the real purpose of holding examinations should be to determine:

1 whether the objectives of teaching have been properly under-

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- stood and assessed;
- 2 whether the strategy chosen for fulfilling these objectives is appropriate;
- 3 whether the tools used are the right ones;
- 4 whether the tools are being properly used.

In other words, examinations should serve as a check on the entire system of teaching. The performance of the students should provide the 'feed-back' which curriculum planners, textbook writers and teachers need to find out if they are proceeding on the right lines. As such, examinations are an integral part of the teaching-learning process and the soundness of the examination system will largely determine the soundness of the rest.

Later, we shall have occasion to discuss more fully the curricula, courses, teaching techniques and evaluation procedures for English at the college level.

In the next chapter, we shall discuss the nature of language learning, after which we shall return to the elements of teaching methodology.

HOW LANGUAGE IS LEARNT (I): THE MEANING OF 'LEARNING'

The purpose of teaching, we have said, is to produce learning. The teacher will be successful in this only to the extent that he is able to understand the process by which learning takes place and to stimulate, control and direct it.

There are certain general principles involved in all learning. However, the nature of *what* is being learnt does have an effect on *how* it is learnt: the process by which a language is learnt (for example) is different from the process by which mathematics is learnt. The process may, to an extent, be 'subject-specific'.

We shall first consider the general psychological principles of learning and then attempt to relate them to our specific context: the learning of English as a second language at the college level. (It is necessary to specify the level—in terms of age and maturation—of the learner because this also has a bearing on the process of learning).

Two sets of considerations are involved here:

- 1 What is the nature of learning?
- 2 What are the factors that influence it?

Earlier we described learning as the change in behaviour or state of knowledge (of the learner) caused by exposure to experience. This brings together two different aspects or dimensions of the learning process, both of which are significant: the *behavioural* and the *perceptual*.

Even the simplest organism exhibits behaviour—that is, it is capable of reacting to or producing a response to any stimulus or change in the environment. The single-celled organism, the amoeba, can, for instance, move in the direction in which food is to be found. However, the range of behaviour which the simpler organisms possess is limited. They are only capable of responding to a small set of stimuli (temperature, food, etc.) and in each case the response to a given stimulus is fixed and predictable. (The amoeba always behaves in the same way when its environmental conditions are changed.) There is never any change in behaviour, and in such

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cases we say that no learning is possible

In more complex organisms, however, there is the possibility of changes in the pattern of behaviour. First, the organism is capable of responding to a much wider range of stimuli. Second, even if an unfamiliar or unusual stimulus is provided, the organism is capable of *developing* a response to it. Third, the relationship between stimulus and response is not always fixed and unchanging as it is in the lower organisms. The higher an organism, the greater is its possible range of behaviour, and the greater its capacity for learning.

According to some psychologists, 'learning' is basically a process whereby the 'learner' (whether human or not) is trained to produce a desired pattern of behaviour. The learner's behaviour is shaped until it becomes acceptable. This means that behaviour which is not acceptable must be given up or prevented.

What is the mechanism through which the learner is made to give up unwanted behaviour and produce desired behaviour?

Psychologists have proposed different answers to this question. What is common to most such proposals is the suggestion that a certain behaviour can be said to have been 'learnt' when the learner produces it accurately and unfailingly whenever he (or it) is exposed to a particular stimulus. The stimulus to which the learner is trained to respond acts as the 'cue' which 'triggers off' the desired behaviour in the learner. (It is to be noticed here that there cannot be any 'natural' or inevitable link between the cue and the desired behaviour. If there is, the behaviour produced by the learner cannot be said to be 'learnt'. Thus, the signs of pleasure which a dog will exhibit on being shown a bone do not constitute 'learnt' behaviour; but if the dog responds in the same way at the sight of a rubber ball, this does appear to be the result of learning.)

Learning of this kind (i.e., the production of a desired form of behaviour in response to a particular cue) is said to result from a process of *association*. The learner is made to associate the given stimulus with the desired response—the stimulus and the response are linked together in such a way that for the learner they become inseparable. The American psychologist, Thorndike, called this phenomenon the formation of a 'connection', or 'associative bond'. Other psychologists, such as Skinner, use the term 'conditioning' to describe this phenomenon.

In the classical experiment by Pavlov, a dog was trained or

conditioned, to salivate (the desired response) at the ringing of a bell (the cue). In this case, the conditioning was produced in the following sequence (represented here by a series of stimuli together with the corresponding responses obtained):

1 Stimulus (S) = Food $\rightarrow$ Response (R) = Salivation

2 Stimulus (S_1) = Bell $\rightarrow$ Response (R) = Nil

(The ringing of the bell does not, by itself, produce the response in the animal.)

3 Stimulus ($S + S_1$) = Food + Bell $\rightarrow$ Response (R) = Salivation

(When the ringing of the bell is associated with the original stimulus, food, the desired response is obtained.)

4 Stimulus (S_1) = Bell $\rightarrow$ Response (R) = Salivation

Even when the original stimulus, food, is removed the link between the ringing of the bell and the response, salivation, continues. This exists now as 'learnt' or 'conditioned' behaviour.

In the Pavlovian experiment, the response is kept constant: what is varied is the nature of the stimulus that produces it. In this case, learning consists in the response getting shifted to a new stimulus; that is, a new 'connection' or link is formed. This link is formed when two quite separate and unrelated stimuli (the food stimulus and the bell) are brought together repeatedly. The amount of repetition is important: the more often the experience is repeated, the stronger is the link or connection between the cue and the desired response, and the more effective the 'learning'.

But there appears to be another factor too, which may have an influence on the effectiveness of learning. The dog, in the experiment, learns to associate a 'neutral' experience (the ringing of the bell) with another experience which is pleasant (the sight of food). The dog salivates at the ringing of the bell because it brings back a 'memory' of food. But what would happen if the bell brought back some other 'memory'—a memory that was unpleasant or painful?

What is being suggested now is that learning may be influenced by the effect that accompanies it. This is precisely what is demonstrated in another kind of experiment, which is associated with the psychologist Skinner.

A rat is put in a cage, which is provided with a compartment in which pellets of food are kept. The rat cannot, however, gain access to the food except by pressing a lever; each time this lever is pressed, a single pellet of food is released. There are a number of

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other levers in the cage too, which do not operate the food compartment; they are there to 'distract' the animal. At the sight of the food the rat scampers round the cage, trying to reach it. It performs various movements in trying to get at the food. Eventually, it may happen to press the right lever, entirely by accident, and is immediately rewarded by a pellet of food. The rat may not immediately perceive the relation between cause and effect, but after a few more trials of this kind it learns the connection between the lever and the food. If the rat is now put into another cage, of identical design, it knows which lever it has to press. It goes straight to the correct lever, without making a false move.

The form of learning here (the 'learning paradigm') can be represented by the following Stimulus-Response relationships:

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Stimulus (S)} = \text{Food} \rightarrow \text{Set of Responses (R}_1\text{)} \\ & \quad (R_2) \\ & \quad (R_3) \\ & \quad (R_4), \text{ etc.}\end{aligned}$$

The various responses represent the activities performed by the animal in trying to reach the food. Of these, only *one* (say R_4) is the correct response; the others are unwanted responses.

When the correct response is produced, the animal is rewarded by a pellet of food. The reward has the effect of reinforcing the correct response. The unwanted responses are weakened because they are not reinforced, and they gradually disappear. Only the correct response remains.

The second (Skinnerian) kind of conditioned learning obviously differs from the first (Pavlovian) kind. In both cases, learning takes the form of an association between a stimulus and a response and, in both cases, the association is progressively strengthened by a process of reinforcement. But while in the first case reinforcement is obtained by the *repetition* of the learning experience, in the second it is produced by *rewarding* or encouraging the desired response and discouraging the unwanted responses. This suggests that reinforcement depends even more on the consequences of learning than on the amount of repetition.

While in many cases learning can be interpreted (as above) in terms of responses and stimuli, it is not always possible to interpret learning in so straightforward a manner. In experiments conducted with apes, for example, the animals exhibit behaviour which is markedly different from that of the rats in Skinner's experiment

(which learn by a gradual process of trial and error). In one experiment, some apes were put in a room, from the ceiling of which a bunch of bananas was hung, out of the animals' reach. The animals were, in effect, given a problem to solve, which consisted in joining together a number of sticks of wood to form a kind of 'fishing-rod', and using this instrument to reach the bunch of bananas. (The task was more complex than the one set for the rats in Skinner's experiment, where success by trial and error was possible.)

The apes began by making random attempts at reaching the bananas (jumping, using the sticks individually, etc.). But some of the apes showed a capacity, at this stage, for 'reasoning out' the problem, and solving it in the manner required (joining the sticks together). It was as if the animals were able to form some kind of insight into the nature of the behaviour expected of them, independent of further trial and error, and to use this insight in solving the problem.

This suggests that in the more intelligent animals learning takes place within a framework of *perception*. Each new stimulus brings about a change in the structure of perception—that is, of the assessment which the learner is able to make of the total environment. It is the total perceptual pattern (or *gestalt*), rather than the immediate stimulus, that leads to the response. Learning, in this case, really involves readiness in the individual to perceive objects and situations in a new way.

We have been considering some of the forms that learning may take. But what are the conditions that influence learning? This question can be answered by analysing the experiments described already.

We have seen that learning is the consequence of exposure to a structured and directed learning experience. There can be no learning in the absence of such exposure.

Further, learning seems to depend on the reinforcement of the learning experience. In other words, experiences leading to learning have to be repeated; a single exposure is rarely enough. The importance of practice or *exercise* in learning is evident.

The Skinnerian experiments show, however, that exercise may not be as crucial as making the learning experience *rewarding*. The reward provides the motivation in inducing, accelerating and reinforcing learning. Motivating the learner adequately is even more important than providing practice.

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Once this principle is accepted, it becomes necessary to understand the nature of motivation. The dogs, rats, pigeons and apes in the experiments are motivated by the desire for food, which forms one of the strongest physical motivations, since it is linked to a primary need. In general, all behaviour is related to needs, since behaviour is directed (overtly or covertly) to the satisfaction of needs. One could even say that behaviour is produced when there is some tension or imbalance between a need and its satisfaction. Once a pattern of behaviour is established it tends to remain fixed, and a new pattern can replace it only if it is more satisfying.

The most powerful kind of motivation, therefore, can be obtained by linking the learning experience, in a direct and obvious way, to the satisfaction of a need (or needs) which the learner has. Learning must, above all, be relevant to felt needs.

Food, while it is the most effective of all rewards for a learning animal, is not the only kind of reward possible. We are all aware that a dog can be taught tricks more easily if it is rewarded, on doing what it is expected to do, by an affectionate pat or word from the master. In such a situation the encouragement or praise which the learner receives on achieving success constitutes the reward motivation, even though it leads to no satisfaction of primary physical needs.

Learning can also be linked to punishment, rather than to reward; but many psychologists, teachers and parents are of the opinion that punishment is much less effective a motivation in learning than reward. Perhaps it is a greater disincentive than it is thought to be.

There can be yet another kind of 'reward' which is independent of any obvious 'need satisfaction' or even praise or encouragement. This is the sense of achievement which a learner experiences from the mere fact of success in a learning task, even if he gets no reward for it. (Correspondingly, the learner is frustrated if he fails to achieve success, and this frustration can be a powerful disincentive in learning.)

We have been stressing the importance of reward-motivation in learning. (Learning of this kind, which makes use of the effects of learning, is known as 'success learning'. In all such cases, the learner has to be provided with immediate confirmation of learning (evidence of having achieved success).)

With human learners, success seems to be more satisfying if the

nature of the task is difficult and complex. The more challenging the learning task becomes, the more rewarding success with it can be for the learner. But when learning involves only mechanical operations, devoid of any mental or intellectual challenge, it can become monotonous and stultifying.

It is important, therefore, not only to obtain adequate and proper motivation but to sustain it. The effects of fatigue, both physical and mental, have to be considered and allowance made for the limitations of the learner (again, physical as well as mental). For example, the limits of memory, attention, etc. have to be kept in mind.

We could sum up what we have been saying about the factors conducive to learning in the following way:

- 1 Learning depends on reinforcement.
- 2 In general, the greater the amount of exercise, the greater the reinforcement and the more effective the learning.

However, three qualifications to this principle have to be kept in mind:

- a Before learning can begin, the learner must be brought into a *state of readiness* to learn. (This is what the psychologist describes as a 'set'.)
- b Too much exercise leads to fatigue and a decline in learning capacity. Exercise should therefore be *spaced*.
- c The same kind of exercise, if repeated, also leads to fatigue. Exercise should be *varied*.

3 Learning must be motivated.

- a The strongest motives are connected to satisfaction of needs.
- b Reward is a far stronger incentive than punishment.
- c Success in learning can be itself an incentive; failure can be a deterrent.

d In success learning, there must be immediate confirmation.

4 Learning should be challenging. Solving problems is more challenging than rote or mechanical learning.

The psychology of learning is a fascinating study. So far, our understanding of the process by which human beings learn is still imperfect. It is one thing to study isolated aspects of human behaviour under controlled laboratory conditions; to understand the complex processes and mechanisms by which learning takes place in real life is another. It is perhaps by a combination of some of the processes we have described that learning takes place. To add to

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the complexity, there is now evidence to show that the processes vary considerably from one individual to another, so that it is difficult to make any valid generalizations which could be helpful to the teacher.

We have not gone into the details of the learning process because our concern is mainly with the process by which *language* is learnt. Most of the important kinds of human learning depend on the use of language; they presuppose that the human individual already knows *some* language. It is obvious, therefore, that the learning of language cannot be equated with other kinds of learning: it is a much more fundamental and intimate part of human existence.

In the next chapter we shall consider the process by which language is learnt.

HOW LANGUAGE IS LEARNT (II): THE LEARNING OF FIRST AND SECOND LANGUAGES

One of the difficulties facing the teacher at the college level is that his students are past the age when languages can be easily learnt. We know that little children can pick up two, three or even four languages simultaneously and effortlessly, if placed in situations in which several languages have to be used. Most grown-ups, however, have to struggle to acquire even one additional language.

Man is born with a natural capacity for acquiring language, which seems to diminish after adolescence. Only man can acquire language, and every man—even the dullest—can acquire it. (People whose brains are incapacitated by injury may form the exception.) It appears that this capacity for acquiring language does not have much correlation with general intelligence.

The process by which language is acquired is little understood. At one time it was held that this process is largely dependent on memory and imitation. The child, it was said, learns at a very early age to distinguish the sounds of human language from other, non-language sounds; he learns to connect these sounds with the situations, gestures, activities, etc., which accompany them, and thus begins to perceive the rudiments of 'meaning' in language. After the stage of perception comes the stage of imitation. The child begins to acquire muscular control over his speech organs, and tries to imitate the language sounds he has heard, in order to bring about certain desired responses in others: his parents, for example. If the correct sound is produced in an appropriate situation, and the desired response is obtained, the child gets a confirmation of the sound-situation relationship, which, after some further repetition or reinforcement, gets imprinted on his brain, and is stored in the memory, available for recall; the child has learnt the first language signal (or utterance). In this way, he goes on adding to his stock of language.

The school of psychology which interprets the language-learning process thus is known as *Behaviourism*, because it is largely concerned

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with human (or animal) behaviour as a pattern of stimuli and responses. The child acquiring language is said to be conditioned to produce the correct language behaviour automatically in response to a situational stimulus. This is said to be the *natural* process of language learning, which the teacher of language should try to simulate.

What are some of the implications of this theory for the teacher?

- 1 Language is learnt only through use, through practice. The more one exposes the learner to the use of language, the better he learns it.
- 2 The production of language depends on the situation which makes its use necessary. Language cannot be taught in isolation from situation; the teacher has to introduce each new pattern of language in a meaningful situation.
- 3 Producing the correct linguistic response to a stimulus requires effort. If the learner is not called upon to make this effort there is no learning.
- 4 Producing the correct response also requires attention. Attention is bound to slacken after a time, so prolonged practice is less useful than spaced practice.
- 5 The spoken language comes earlier than the written, and the receptive (passive) experience of language is necessary before any productive (active) use can begin.
- 6 Learning takes place faster if the correct response to a stimulus is immediately confirmed. The learner must know at once if his effort is right or wrong.
- 7 Learning is still faster if the learner is placed in a situation where he can produce only the correct response. Each incorrect response builds up a faulty behaviour pattern which interferes with the process of conditioning.
- 8 Every new item learnt must be reinforced by repeated practice before further learning begins.

Most of the methods used over the past thirty or forty years for teaching language made use of these assumptions from Behaviourism. They emphasized repeated, but spaced, practice of language material in meaningful situations, in imitation of a given model: first orally, and only then in writing.

More recently, some of these assumptions have been questioned. It has been argued that conditioning, or the formation of automatic habits of behaviour, cannot explain the fact that children are able

to produce utterances which are totally new to them. The child does not add to his stock of language simply by memorizing more and more sound-situation relationships (language signals); that would be a very slow, laborious process. Actually, the child acquires his first language (or languages) with astonishing rapidity and ease.

According to the new thinking, the Behaviourist interpretation of the language-learning process as a form of nervous (automatic) response to a stimulus is altogether too mechanistic; it does not allow for the operation of rational, mental processes which undoubtedly exist, and which distinguish human from animal behaviour. It seems more accurate to describe the process of language learning as *cognitive*, rather than conditioned behaviour; the child adds to his stock of language by gaining an insight into the patterns and the underlying relationships that exist in language, abstracting some general system of rules, and applying this to generate other patterns. The child is able to do this because of some genetic or biological faculty that human beings possess, even at birth; the structure of language corresponds, in some way, to the biological structure of the brain.

It is not necessary, at this point, to get involved in the debate. For the teacher of language, there are, however, important consequences. As we have said before, most language teaching methods in use today employ Behaviourist assumptions, and the fact that they do produce results shows that there is at least some substance in them. But the methods can be refined by allowing for the fact that human beings use language creatively and rationally; hence language teaching must be creative, and must allow the learner to form rational insights, and use them intelligently. Too often in the past, language teaching tended to become mere repetitive and mechanical drilling, under the assumption that language learning is merely the formation of unthinking, automatic habits.

One thing seems certain: whatever may be the process by which the first language (or languages) is learnt, the process by which other languages are learnt subsequently is different. Once the first language has been acquired, the learner is in possession of a system of communication which seems largely to control his response to and understanding of the things around him. When he begins to learn a second language, which may make use of an entirely different system, the pattern which has already been established begins to interfere. This interference has to be overcome consciously. The

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learning of a second language is thus a more deliberate activity than the learning of a first language.

One learns one's first language at home, or in society, unconsciously; one is constantly exposed to it and begins to soak it up like a sponge. But exposure to a second language is much more limited. In the case of English, which pupils do not often hear outside the classroom, the teacher may be the only source of exposure. It becomes the responsibility of the teacher to decide which areas of language the student should be exposed to, and what the order of presentation should be. (In a natural situation, there is no such control.) Moreover, whereas the skills of listening and speaking precede those of reading and writing in learning a first language, there is perhaps no *natural* reason why this should be so in the case of a second language too.

One should think of the teaching-learning process as a double-edged activity: in order that effective learning may take place a number of learner's requirements must be fulfilled, and each such requirement for the learner involves a corresponding activity on the teacher's part.

First, the learner needs motivation for learning, and it is the teacher in the classroom who has to provide the immediate motivation, although quite often the ultimate motivation depends on external social influences. Immediate motivation is provided by making the process of learning pleasant, interesting and challenging and by relating the object of learning to the learner's past experiences and present and future needs. What is learnt should not be too difficult for the learner but it should not be too easy either, or it will cease to stimulate him. Each new step in learning should be an advance over the last, and should lead on to the next.

When the learner feels that he is at the centre of the process of learning (rather than at the periphery), and finds that he is participating actively in the task the process becomes more rewarding. The mental satisfaction that a learner gets from solving each problem put to him can, to an extent, provide strong motivation. The good teacher makes use of this by turning the process of learning into some kind of a problem-solving activity, the learner himself being allowed to find the answers. The teacher helps him with questions, guiding him to new areas of learning, and providing the answers when the student fails to find them.

Although what we have said above applies mainly to young

learners, much of it will be true of the teaching and learning of language at the college level. It is only the mature, adult learner who may not need to be motivated by the teacher; the college entrant has to be motivated as much as any pre-adolescent learner. However, it is much more difficult to motivate him because he has already developed an attitude or a set of attitudes to what he is learning, which he did not have at an earlier age. To give a concrete example: when a schoolboy begins to study English, he usually does not stop to think whether this is a desirable activity; he simply accepts it as something to be learnt. But the college entrant may have his own opinions on the subject, and this may influence his learning.

Consider, then, the problem of relating the *thing taught* to the learner's needs and interests. We know that the schoolboy's needs for English are likely to be of the most general kind, but at the college level they become more specific. Also, the interests of the adolescent college entrant are more difficult to predict and satisfy. The average Indian college student learning English may have little ability in it, but he has a more mature mind as well as a fair amount of sophistication in the use of his own language. Very often the texts used for teaching English (as a language) at college level assume a readership of a much lower mental age than actually obtaining, and this is reflected in the choice of topics. A visit to the zoo can be exciting at a certain age, but it might not be quite the ideal thing to talk about if one wanted to teach English to a seventeen-year old. It is very difficult to relate actual language needs to learners' interests and cultural ability at this level.

Then, again, many of the classroom techniques designed to teach language skills to young children, such as oral drilling, are sometimes tried out at the college level, with rather poor results. The college student may resent being treated like a nine-year-old. For him, language learning should be more challenging than just carrying out repetitive tasks.

We have considered the factors which could influence the learning of a second language because they are of great importance in any programme for the teaching of English in this country, and should influence decision-making in all aspects of teaching: the framing of a curriculum, the designing of course materials, and the adoption of techniques for classroom teaching and testing.

THE USE OF ENGLISH

Two important principles which emerge from the earlier chapters can be summarized thus:

- 1 teaching is relevant only to the extent that it produces learning;
- 2 no learning is effective unless it is related to the needs of the learner.

We can make use of these principles in deciding:

- 1 what the learner of English in India needs the language for; how much of it he should be required to learn, and how thoroughly he should learn it;
- 2 how this learning can be effected.

For the present, we shall be concerned with the first of these issues. It is important to decide first *what* to teach, and why. The question, 'How to teach?', can be answered later.

A human society needs language (i) for communication between its members (internal) as well as for communication with other societies (external), and (ii) to express and record its culture (including that part of the culture which is called 'knowledge').

In its ordinary, day-to-day use language has a communicative function, but it has a cultural function too, which is manifested in literature for instance. The distinction that we make between language and literature indicates the two different functions which language can have.

Human societies are more extensively concerned with language as a mode of communication than as the expression of a culture. We can conceive of primitive societies, which possess no literature, but we cannot think of a society which does not make use of language for inter-personal communication. The individual needs language to become an effective member of the society, and the society, in turn, needs language to carry out all its functions. How effectively the society functions depends a good deal on how efficiently it learns to use language for communication.

One has to learn how to use language, even one's mother tongue, efficiently. Training in the effective use of language is necessary in

the highly organized social structure that exists today, where the kinds of situations requiring communication are becoming more and more complex.

Language, when used for communication, is a tool, and the handling of any tool requires a certain skill. The inborn ability to use language that all human beings possess has to be developed and sharpened through practice. When we say of someone that he is a good user of language we mean that he is able to use language effectively for all his communication needs, in all kinds of situations—that he possesses all the communication skills, or language skills. These are: Listening (with understanding), Speaking, Reading and Writing (LSRW, for short).

Observe a group of people conversing in their mother tongue. Usually, they speak rather fast, and not always carefully or distinctly. Sometimes they do not even complete their sentences. However, they have little trouble in understanding each other. Since they all know the language well, each is able to anticipate what the other person may want to say in a certain situation, and even if some of the words are missing, it does not seem to matter. A speaker, in such a group, rarely has to halt and grope for words; they come naturally. This is not to say that all speakers are equally effective or forceful, but most do possess the minimal skills necessary for expression. The two speech skills—listening and speaking—develop fairly rapidly and effortlessly in the learning of the first language. But we do not communicate through speech alone; a great deal of our communication in the modern world is through the printed word, and to communicate effectively in the written language one needs mastery of the two skills of literacy: reading and writing. These are more difficult to acquire, and that is why governments have to invest enormous sums of money in literacy programmes for adults.

When we say that even in the mother tongue the language skills need to be trained, we are referring to all the four skills, but most specifically to those of reading and writing. Theoretically, all the skills are equally important in the use of the mother tongue, but some skills may be more highly developed in some individuals than others. In a modern society, the individual may require not only a general proficiency in handling language, but a narrower kind of specialization, involving a high degree of efficiency in the use of a particular language skill. An editor, for example, needs to be able

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to read through masses of writing of all kinds at great speed, to understand the contents and also judge their quality.

If communication through the mother tongue can be difficult and can require specialized training, surely this is more true of communication through a second or third language. Nevertheless, it may become necessary for people to communicate with others through a language which is not their own. Some societies are able to fulfil all their needs of communication through a single language. There are other societies, such as the Indian (or the Swiss), which make use of several languages even for internal communication. The members of such a society often find it necessary to learn to use one or more additional languages, besides their own. (In India, for example, the 'Three-language Formula' has been regarded as a necessity.) The additional languages which the members of a society habitually employ for communication within the society can be called *Second Languages*. (In the Indian census, these languages have been called 'Other Tongues' as distinguished from 'Mother Tongues'.)

But there is another complexity. Today, most societies also find it necessary to communicate with other societies. Such external communication makes the use of *Foreign Languages* necessary.

We are thus faced with situations which may force upon the individual a need to learn one or more native or foreign languages in addition to his first language. His society has to recognize this need and provide for its satisfaction in its system of education.

This imposes on the society the responsibility of choosing which languages should be taught and learnt. It would be wonderful indeed if we could all learn everything there was to learn; but unfortunately, we can only learn something at the cost of something else, which we choose *not* to learn. The effort involved in learning second or third languages may be, for most people, so great that it interferes with other kinds of desirable learning. The case for learning each additional language must be decided on merit.

What is the case for learning English? This has been discussed so often that any repetition may seem tiresome, but without defining our objectives, a clear understanding of what is involved in the teaching of English will not be possible.

First, we have to decide whether we in India are concerned today with English as a means of communication, or as a record and expression of literary and cultural values, or both. When Lord

Macaulay advocated the propagation of English in this country, he seemed to be concerned more with the language as a repository of culture than as a mode of communication. He failed to make a distinction between the way a society makes use of its first language, and the way it uses all the additional languages that it is obliged to adopt. The first language is the natural medium for feeling and thinking, for all creative or cultural expression. Since the communicative function of this language is almost taken for granted, its uses for intellectual activity single out attention. But any additional language which the society adopts—either voluntarily or under pressure—becomes primarily a vehicle for communication of rather practical kinds. Lord Macaulay hoped that Indians would take to English naturally and learn to use it in the same way as native speakers of the language, and that English would serve the cultural functions which a mother tongue normally serves. This gave rise to the tendency to think of English as the *first* language for its Indian learners. Consequently, the approach to the learning and teaching of English was very nearly the same as that adopted in England. This is why the study of English literature began to be emphasized—not as an aid to learning the language (which it can be) but as a valuable intellectual and cultural discipline in itself. Learning the skills of the language for purposes of communication was never seen as the primary objective. If the teaching of English in India has remained unsatisfactory, it is largely because of this failure to see English as an additional language, to be learnt entirely for its practical benefits and to be used in communication.

Even now, many people refuse to see clearly that our decisions in regard to the teaching of English should be based entirely on practical considerations and not be clouded over by emotion. We, in this country, have developed a unique 'love-hate' relationship with English. To some, it is a disgraceful relic of our slavery and must be banished at once. There are others who feel, as Raja Rammohan Roy did, that India's progress and modernity are forever linked to the English language. Some people feel that today English should be treated as just a foreign language, like French or Russian; in fact, some of them would prefer, as a reaction to two centuries of enforced learning of English, to learn Chinese instead. There are others who proclaim that English is as much a language of the Indian people as Hindi or Marathi, and should be treated

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on a par with them.

Both these views are extreme. The fact is that in India English is something more than a foreign language and something less than a second language. It has many more users, and many more uses, than a foreign language has. At the same time, the predominant role which English had in many areas of communication is gradually being taken over by other languages. Both these facts must be considered in the plans for the teaching and learning of English.

The strategy for learning second languages is different from that adopted for learning foreign languages. In the first place, second languages have to be taught on a more extensive scale since they are likely to be used by many more people. (A second language, by definition, is one that is used internally in the society and therefore affects many more people.) Foreign languages, on the other hand, need to be learnt and taught only on a limited scale. Further, the people who do make use of a foreign language are rarely required or expected to use it as well as they can use a first language. In a foreign language one seldom requires all the four skills. A scientist working in a theoretical field may, for example, need to be able to *read* scientific literature in a foreign language; a technician deputed to a foreign country and required to work with semi-skilled labour may have no use for the skill of reading in the foreign language but would certainly require the speech skills. Therefore, in teaching a foreign language, some scale of priorities has to be determined for teaching the communication skills, and this may be varied according to the requirements of the learners.

The learner of a second language, on the other hand, should ideally be able to use it as effectively for communication as he uses his first language. It has been said that the aim of second language teaching is to produce bilinguals who are almost ambilinguals—people who command two languages equally well. Of course, it is seldom possible to attain this goal; but clearly, the learning and teaching of second languages needs to be thorough, much more so than of foreign languages. As all the four skills are likely to be required in the second language, a multi-skill approach has to be adopted in teaching it.

Let us now try to sum up all that we have said in this chapter about the teaching of English:

- 1 We must organize the teaching of English not as a first language but as an additional language. The strategy and tech-

niques adopted for the teaching of English should be those appropriate to second or foreign languages. Historically, this is what has been lacking in this country.

- 2 For most people, only the communicative function of English is relevant. The cultural function is secondary; but it will be desirable not to overlook this since, for historical reasons, the English language has become an important element of contemporary Indian culture.
- 3 We are most concerned with learning the skills of the English language so as to be able to use it for communication. The study of English literature is not essential to the learning of these skills; but, if properly used, literature can be an aid in the acquisition of the language skills.
- 4 English has a status which is more nearly that of a second than of a foreign language. It is likely to have many users and many uses in India for a long time to come, and its teaching must be both extensive and relatively intensive.
- 5 Since English will be used in internal as well as external communication, all the language skills will have to be taught and learnt to some extent.

However, it has to be recognized that English may, in future, be called upon to play a more restricted and specialized role than hitherto assigned to it. Though it will not be the 'dominant' language, it will be irreplaceable in at least one of its functions—that of a 'library' language.

This implies that the skill of reading and, to a lesser extent, writing, may have to be more strongly emphasized than the speech skills. If English were required *only* as a library language, then one could minimize, but not eliminate, the learning of all the skills except reading—but such is not the case. As we have said, English occupies a rather unique position. We will discuss this more fully later.

We have tried to touch upon some of the needs which the learner of English may experience, and to indicate what he should be taught in relation to these needs. In the next chapter we shall discuss further the 'content' of the English that should be taught to the learner.

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THE 'CONTENT' OF THE TEACHING
OF ENGLISH

What exactly is implied by 'knowing a language'?

This question can be answered through an illustration. Imagine that you already know several languages and are trying, consciously and deliberately, to learn a new one. What is the first thing that you would attempt to learn? Most probably, you would begin by trying to find out the equivalents, in the new language, of the words you most commonly use in the languages you already know: the equivalents of words like 'I', 'you', 'he', or 'eat' and 'go', or 'food' and 'water', etc. Without knowing some of the words (*vocabulary*) of a language you cannot even begin to make use of it for communication.

But knowing the words is not enough. One must know how to use words to convey meaning, how to combine words to form 'utterances' that can be understood. You may not, for example, be able to convey the idea of thirst by merely using the equivalents of 'I', 'want', and 'water'. You should know how to express the meaning contained in the English sentence, 'I want some water', in the other language. In Hindi, for example, the pattern is: *For me some water want*. Different languages have different ways of expressing the same meaning. These are what we call the *patterns* or *structures* of the language. In any language, a pattern is made up of words, but in each language the words are put together in certain specified ways, making use of certain devices which are peculiar to that language. To be able to use the language, therefore one needs to know the words and the structures of the language. Together they make up the 'content' of the language.

The words, in any language, are numerous: English has over half a million. A distinction is sometimes made between 'content words' (*lexical items*) and 'structure words' (*grammatical items*). Content words (items) carry a recognizable, identifiable meaning even when used in isolation (e.g., 'fruit', 'eat', 'green', etc.). The list of such words is long in any language, and it is an 'open-ended' list—that is, it is always capable of growing by receiving new

entries. (English, for example, has recently added 'helipad', 'cosmonaut', etc., to its list of content words). Structure words, on the other hand, are used only in relation to the other words in a structure, (e.g., 'of', 'the', 'and', 'some', etc.) and the list of such words forms a 'closed set'—that is, no new entries are being added to the list. In learning the words of a language one ordinarily has to learn almost all the structure words because they are required for even the most ordinary kinds of communication.

We have already said that all learning implies a choice—a selection of one thing in preference to another. In the learning of a language the selection of what is to be learnt, of the 'content', is particularly essential. This is because language is, as we have seen, 'open-ended'—it is constantly growing and adding to itself. In a sense it is 'infinite', unlike simple arithmetic, which is 'finite' in its content. Moreover, arithmetic is constant and invariable: wherever one goes, the sum of 2 and 2 is always 4. But language, being a form of human activity that is culture-bound, varies from place to place: Englishmen living a hundred miles apart may speak very differently. Language is not a solid monolith, as arithmetic is: one could think of it as a many-layered cake, and the learner can be offered only a slice of the cake at a time, not the whole of it.* The appropriate slice is what has to be selected.

Which words and structures of the English language should we select for teaching?

This will depend on what we want to use the language for. The British 'memsahibs' in pre-Independent India, for example, learnt the Indian languages only for the purpose of ordering their servants about and one can imagine the kind of words they must have learnt!

Within the same language there are different varieties which may differ quite widely from each other. We know, for instance, that the English used in America is different from that used in Britain. Varieties of the same language differing in geographical distribution are called 'dialects'. (It is being claimed that the variety of English used by Indians is different enough from other varieties to constitute an independent dialect of English: 'Indian English'.) But a language does not only manifest geographical

*One can, perhaps, be taught the 'whole' of arithmetic, but not the whole of English.

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varieties: inhabitants of the same region can use different forms of the same language depending upon the circumstances of use. A school-teacher, for example, will use very different 'kinds' of Hindi in talking to a butcher and to a fellow school-teacher. The differences will lie not only in the words used, but also in the structures. Such varieties of language, which depend on the circumstances of use, are called 'registers'. There may be a 'Doctor's Register' of English, an 'Engineer's Register', a 'Lawyer's Register' and so on.

A versatile speaker of a language may be able to command several dialects and registers in that language. But for purposes of teaching and learning, the first decision to be taken is: Which dialect and register of the language should be selected out of the choices available? The selection of a dialect is somewhat automatic, since nearly every society which uses a number of dialects (of the same language) adopts one of them as the 'standard'. This is the one which is taught at least in the written form. (Dialects differ from each other mostly in pronunciation and vocabulary. The least difference is found in syntax (the rules for forming sentences). Thus the differences between dialects are seen most clearly in the spoken forms; the written forms are similar except for the words peculiar to each dialect.)

The selection of registers, however, is important. There is a part of the language which is common to all registers and it is used for all kinds of communication. But beyond this core, the words and structures in use may vary from one register to another. The words and structures which belong to no particular register (but are common to all) form the *general service* core of the language. The ordinary speaker of a language, possessing no knowledge of linguistics and only a casual interest in the behaviour of languages, will seldom be able to tell which words or structures in his language belong to the general service core, and which of them belong to particular registers. It is here that linguistics can help teaching a good deal by classifying and categorizing language items (words and structures) so that a selection can be made from them for the purposes of teaching. The linguist can, for example, tell us which part of the language is indispensable for general service. Obviously, this is the part of the language that every learner must learn, and this should constitute the 'first slice of the language cake' that he is offered.

But even a full slice of the cake would be too much for anyone to manage at once: it would have to be bitten off in successive mouthfuls! The 'selection' of items implies also some kind of gradation, some sequential arrangement of the items to be learnt in some kind of order of difficulty or teachability.

It is said that the main difference between learning an additional language and acquiring a first is that in the latter case there is no selection or gradation of the language items. The learner is exposed to the language indiscriminately, without any plan; one could say that he is exposed to the 'whole' language, assuming, for the moment, that such a thing exists, all at once, in a multi-pronged assault on all his senses. The learner of a first language is virtually flooded with it. If the same thing were to happen to a second-language learner in the classroom, he would, in all probability, drown! Not everyone can manage to learn a new language by going to live in the society where it is used all the time, and by exposing themselves to it constantly and relentlessly. Most people require some kind of conscious and deliberate teaching, and this involves some kind of selection and grading. Even in the case of a first language, the acquisition of language does not take place all at once, but by stages. Although the learner is exposed to the whole language at once, he seems to be able to filter out for himself the items which he requires at each stage of his linguistic development. Even here, selection and gradation are not altogether absent.

Attempts have been made to arrive at some objective and reliable criteria for the selection and grading of items for the teaching of English. Far more work has been done in connection with the selection and grading of vocabulary than of structures. (The reasons for this will become apparent in the course of this discussion.) In the second and third decades of this century, a number of people tried to prepare lists of the minimum vocabulary that a learner of English should possess. Some of these lists were prepared by Lorge and Thorndike in America, Michael West and I.A. Richards in England, and, subsequently, by Bongers in Holland.

The first criterion is that of 'frequency in use'. We said at the beginning of this chapter that the learner of a new language may start his learning by trying to discover the equivalents of the words most commonly used in his own language. But one cannot decide subjectively what the commonest words are: this is more reliably done on the basis of a statistical count of the frequency with which

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words are used in all kinds of communication, spoken as well as written. (Initially, such counts were obtained only from written communication, as it was difficult to record the spoken language before the invention of the tape-recorder.)

In making frequency counts of words it is necessary to consider samples from all the registers of the language, as this will make the evidence more comprehensive and reliable. For example, a certain word may very frequently be used in scientific writing, and a count based on a thousand words of such writing could reveal a frequency of fifty repetitions of the word (per thousand words). But this will not be enough to establish that is a high-frequency item, for in other registers this word may hardly be used at all. One has to consider also the *range* of a word: in how many different kinds of registers one is likely to encounter it. A word with a wider range of use will have to be preferred over another item with a narrower range even if the latter has a higher frequency of use.

The difficulty is that however wide one may cast one's net in search of useful words for the learner, the material evidence one can find in support of them will never be comprehensive enough. Some of the most useful words in the language may have a comparatively low frequency,—and in all the samples considered a particularly useful word might, accidentally, not have been frequently used. So, in addition to the evidence one can gather empirically, one may have to depend on one's intuition about the usefulness of a particular item. Usually, an experienced teacher of a language can make accurate 'guesses' about the usefulness of a word. (We shall find, as we proceed, that many of the findings of the linguist that are applied to language teaching only corroborate what the good, experienced teacher has known all along without having been trained in linguistics; but this does not in any way reduce the usefulness of linguistic study.) In compiling *minimum-vocabulary lists* (of words essential for the learner) use is made of 'disponibilit ' (availability) studies: this involves a kind of opinion survey about the usefulness of words. The people whose opinions are taken are the people who matter: teachers, writers, eminent users of the language, etc.

Some words are more useful than others not only because they carry 'meanings' which are essential for communication but because they can be used to establish or define many other kinds of meanings. (How often do we use words like 'thing' or 'substance' to

describe concepts which are otherwise difficult to express!) Such words form a part of what we call the 'defining vocabulary' of a language.

Then, there are words which can carry multiple meanings, most of which may be useful. One associates various meanings with the word "table": a piece of furniture, "multiplication tables", "tables of contents", etc., etc. In a frequency count one has to indicate which meaning of a word is more frequently used than another. A word possessing a greater *semantic range* will be preferable to another having a smaller range.

Another useful criterion is that of *productivity*. Some words lend themselves to the formation of many new words (e.g., 'man', 'to man', 'manfully', 'salesman', 'statesmanship', 'one-up-man-ship' etc.). English forms new words by adding prefixes and suffixes (im-, -tion, etc.) to word-stems, and once the conventions of word-formation are known the learner can add many new words to his stock.

Finally, there must be the practical considerations of *teachability*. The learner needs a core vocabulary of words which are concretely and intimately connected with his environment, and which can therefore be taught more easily in the classroom, using practical techniques that we shall consider later.

It is generally held that the learner of English needs a core vocabulary of about 2500 general service words to be able to fulfil all his essential communication needs. (This list would include, of course, nearly all the structure words of English—articles, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, demonstratives (this, that), relatives (which, that etc.), question words (how, when, where, etc.), auxiliary verbs (have, can, etc.)—about 150 or so.) Such a list was, in fact, prepared by Michael West, using the criteria stated above. It was designed to be used mainly by the writers of textbooks for the teaching of English, the framers of syllabuses, and the teachers themselves. Michael West's 'General Service List of 2,000 words' remains authoritative and useful even today, but of course it needs to be revised and adapted to suit particular needs. Many of the words felt to be necessary in West's time have dropped out of use, while other words have emerged as a result of social and cultural changes.

Further, Michael West's list was not prepared with the Indian learner specifically in mind. Many words which have gained cur-

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rency in 'Indian English' and are freely used in communication here, though they do not occur in other 'dialects' of English, are missing from the list. (It is interesting to note that I. A. Richards proposed a kind of dialect of English called Basic English, using a vocabulary of only 850 words.)

Today, it is rather doubtful whether a 2,500-word core vocabulary would serve all essential communication needs. There are many more things that need to be talked (or written) about today than was the case thirty or forty years ago. Perhaps a 3000-or 3,500-word core vocabulary would be nearer the minimum requirement.

A distinction is made between *active* (productive) vocabulary and *passive* (recognition) vocabulary—between the words a learner is able to use correctly in his own speech and writing, and the words he can merely recognize and understand (with varying degrees of accuracy) when he comes across them in the speech or writing of some other user. Obviously, the passive vocabulary of any individual will be more extensive than the active; it will include the latter but also have many additional items that he does not make use of actively. The 2,500-word core vocabulary is an active vocabulary; the passive vocabulary should have at least 4,000 items.

Now we come to the question of the selection and gradation of structures. Is there a minimum core of structures (comparable to the minimum vocabulary) which we can prescribe for the learner to meet all his communication needs? First, we have to be clear that a structure of English is not a sentence of English. There are an infinite number of sentences in the language, since one can form new sentences by combining different words in different ways. But there are restrictions on these combinations. Strictly speaking, it is not words that combine in the sentence, but *groups* or clusters of words. For example, the sentence 'The little brown jug in the round black box may have been broken completely' is not just a string of 14 individual words. It is, more correctly, a combination of the groups which we show below by putting them in brackets and numbering them:

[[The little brown jug] (in the round black box)]	
1	2
[may have been broken] [completely]	
3	4

Each group has been put within square brackets but the first group

may be said to consist of two sub-groups, which are shown by round brackets.

Each numbered group in the sentence is called an *element* or constituent of the sentence. A constituent may have only one word (e.g., no. 4) or it may have more. Some of the constituents are optional (nos. 2 and 4); others are compulsory (nos. 1 and 3).

If we look at the sentences of English (which are, as we have said, infinite in number), we find that they all draw on a rather small number of elements and that the kinds of combinations into which these elements enter are also limited. Hence, it may be possible to represent all the sentences of English (actual or possible) through a limited number of types or patterns. This is done by representing the elements in the sentence through abstract symbols (such as those used in algebra) and then using a kind of formula to represent how these elements combine. Thus, the sentence 'The little brown jug in the round black box may have been broken completely' could be represented by:

$(P+Q)+(R)+(S)$ (where P, Q, R, S represent the same elements shown before as 1, 2, 3, 4 respectively).

Or, we could use a different set of symbols, thus:

$(NP+Prep. P) + (VP) + (Adv)$

Here, NP stands for all elements of the type 'The little brown jug'; Prep. P for all elements of the type 'in the box'; VP for all elements of the type 'may have been broken'; and Adv. for all elements of the type 'completely.'

Other combinations or formulae may be of the type:

Adv. + NP + VP + Prep. P (Actually, the little brown jug was put in the box.)

or

Prep. P + VP + NP (In the box is a little brown jug).

These formulae are what we call structures or patterns. It should be clear that they are not the same as the actual sentences shown on the right. Each formula can yield an infinite number of sentences; the formula represents the *type* and the sentence the *token*.

A structure is thus an abstract thing, a theoretical representation of the reality, while the sentence is the actual thing.

A question now arises—does the learner learn the abstract structures or does he learn the actual sentences?

We have to refer here to the old debate about 'learning a language:

whether it involves *imitation* — *memory* — *habit formation* or *inference* — *generalization* — *rule formation*. In other words, is language learning conditioned behaviour or cognition?

No one would maintain that we learn (by whatever process) the language sentence by sentence (rather as a parrot learns); it would take us several lifetimes to learn enough sentences to be able to communicate.

It must therefore be assumed that we learn the patterns and then learn how to produce sentences on these patterns by substituting different items (words) in the elements combining together. But since the pattern is only an abstraction, it cannot be arrived at at once: the pattern can be introduced only through the sentences illustrating it. We cannot start with the formula (NP+VP+NP) and then arrive at sentences like 'The boy kicked the ball', 'The dog ate the bread', etc. We will have to start at the other end, with the sentences, and then arrive at the formula. The method here is inductive: from many examples or illustrations we arrive at the general abstract pattern.

How does this transition from sentence to structure become possible? Does the teacher present the illustrations (the sentences), show that the sentences are made up of constituents, and then that there are common types of constituents, and finally that their combinations can be represented by a formula? This is a possible procedure, but it would require somewhat advanced and mature learners who can deal with abstractions. No teacher can follow it with a class of little children. Yet, as we have said, children must be able to make the transition, somehow, from sentence to abstract structure, or they would remain parrots all their lives. Do children have some natural ability to proceed from several illustrations to the common underlying pattern by using roughly the kind of reasoning that the teacher would want them to use, and arriving at the same kind of conclusion? This seems to be a plausible explanation.

From a language teacher's point of view this explanation also looks attractive. It would suggest that the teacher's job could be made considerably easier: instead of having to identify thousands and thousands of possible sentences in the English language and selecting and grading them for teaching purposes, he could select out of a much smaller list of structures. Once a structure was learnt it could be used to produce a large number of sentences.

Unfortunately, the list of structures would still be uncomfortably large. So far, we have merely considered structures of the type NP+VP+NP+Adv. ('I saw the man yesterday') or NP+Prep.P.+VP+Adv. ('The little brown jug in the round black box may have been broken completely'). The formulae we have used to represent these structures are far too general. Within each type of structure, there may be many, many sub-types. This is because the constituents (elements) of the sentence such as NP, VP etc. are themselves made up of other elements, which may combine in different ways. The ways in which all the combinations take place are difficult to generalize. There are certain words in the English language which behave in a peculiar way as far as combining with other words is concerned. Take for example, the words 'want' and 'feel'. Both are verbs, and both are somewhat similar in meaning (as they are connected with related areas of human experience). Both can be represented in the formula by VP. In English you can have a sentence like:

I feel that you should go.

But you cannot have a sentence like:

*I want that you should go.

There is no way of explaining why this should be so, except to say that the verb 'want' cannot enter into the same kind of pattern as the verb 'feel'. The learner would have to learn separately the structures or patterns using the verbs 'want' and 'feel'—one general pattern would not be enough.

In English there may be some structures for which only a very few sentences can be found as illustrations. One could even think of structures which are absolutely unique, in the sense that one structure can yield one and only one sentence. They would have to be learnt as if they were idioms.

Briefly, what we are trying to say is this: although it is possible to reduce the sentences of English into 'types', the search for these general types or structures cannot proceed very far, because of the peculiar way in which language behaves. This has been the main difficulty in trying to arrive at a list of selected and graded structures. Many of the 'structures' which have to be included in any list, on such considerations as frequency, usefulness, etc., are hardly structures in the true sense; they have very little generality; they

* The asterisk, before a sentence, indicates its non-acceptability.

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can be used to produce only a very few sentences; and the effort involved in learning them is the same as in learning the individual sentences.

Nevertheless, attempts have been made to draw up such lists of selected and graded structures, to accompany lists of selected and graded vocabulary items. Schools in India have, for twenty years or more, been using 'structurally graded syllabuses', as part of the general 'structural approach to the teaching of English'. The inspiration came from pioneer work carried out at the Institute of Education, London, by people like Mackey, Noonan and others. They were attempting to do for the structures of English what I. A. Richards and others had done for the vocabulary — namely, to prepare a list of the minimum number that a foreign learner would need to be able to communicate adequately (using a 2,500-word vocabulary). It had to be a more arbitrary and subjective kind of selection, because it was difficult to find statistical evidence to show which structures are most commonly used in a language (easy to do in the case of words.)

The criteria of frequency, range, productivity and teachability, used for selecting and grading vocabulary are also relevant to the selection and grading of structures. In addition, the criterion of *complexity* plays an important part. When we first learn to use a language, the structures used by us are relatively simple—there are fewer words and fewer clauses per sentence; when sentences have to be joined together they are usually joined by 'and' or 'but'. As learning develops, the structures become more and more complex. Therefore, in grading, it is sensible to start with the simpler structures, involving fewer words.

As we have said, schools in India have, for twenty years or more, been making use of graded and selected lists of structures and vocabulary. The textbooks prescribed for these schools are written to the controls provided by these lists. There is no list uniformly followed in all the States; the Boards of Secondary Education of the various States may have their own lists, but they are more or less similar. Most school syllabuses prescribe a list of 200 or 250 structures and an active vocabulary of 2,500 words, to be learnt by the end of the fifth (or sixth) year of English (which is also the terminal year of school). This point will be discussed later.

A sample list of graded structures will be found appended to the *Study Group Report* submitted to the Government of India in 1971.

The grading of structures may be *linear*—that is, a number of patterns, of varying degrees of generality, are decided upon and arranged serially, item by item. The sequence to be followed in teaching is decided on the basis of the considerations that we have already discussed (frequency, simplicity, teachability, productivity, etc.)

To illustrate from the Appendix to the Study Group Report, 1971: Structure No. 164 is: There is + Noun (or Pronoun) + V-ing
(e.g., *There is a man waiting. There is something burning.*)

No. 165 Reported Speech (e.g., *Ram said (that) he had been to Calcutta.*)

No. 166 Let (in the meaning of 'allow')
(*Let me go out please. He let me eat a mango.*)

No. 167 make (causal) (*He made me run.*)

Structure No. 165 is, grammatically, the most general and abstract. No. 166 is altogether specific—it deals with a specific word 'let' used to convey a specific meaning (to allow). Nos. 166 and 167 are not structures or patterns in the same sense as nos. 165 or 164. (No. 164 is an important pattern of English which has to be learnt—'There + is + Noun + Verb + ing' etc.—even though it is not as general as some of the other patterns, e.g., NP + VP + NP.) Yet, for convenience, all these have been called structures (though sometimes they are called 'teaching-points') and arranged in a sequence.

Grammatically, structure no. 164 has no relation with no. 165, or with nos. 166 and 167. All these structures come from quite different grammatical 'areas' of the English language. Yet, they have been brought together, presumably because of other considerations.

This kind of 'itemizing' of structures becomes rather arbitrary and *ad hoc*. As an alternative to this, it has been suggested that the *structure* (not the individual structures, but the total structural organisation) of the language be divided into areas or blocks, and these blocks be graded. For example, Block no. 1 could be:

Simple, declarative sentences of the type NP + VP + NP (or, Subject + Transitive Verb + Direct Object); e.g., 'Dogs eat bones'.

One could take up Block no. 1 first and deal with patterns like 'The dog eats bones', 'A dog ate the bones', 'Dogs can eat bones', etc.

Then one could go to Block no. 2 which might be Interrogative Sentences (e.g., 'Do dogs eat bones?' etc.). Block no. 3 might be

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Negatives ('Dogs don't eat bones') and Block no. 4 could be Imperatives (e.g., 'Get the dog a bone!').

This kind of grading is called *block grading*.

The same pattern could be introduced in a number of different blocks. For example, negatives could be introduced with Declaratives ('Dogs don't eat bones' or 'No dog eats bones'), with Interrogatives ('Don't dogs eat bones?') or Imperatives ('Don't touch it!')

The kind of grading which involves re-introduction of the same pattern in relation with different patterns of language (e.g., Declarative Negative—Interrogative Negative—Imperative Negative) is sometimes called *spiral grading*.

It is possible to break up language structure into general areas, but a more detailed 'break-down' into items, to be taught one at a time, is difficult as well as linguistically unsound. In any language the patterns (structures) are so tightly interlocked that it is difficult to treat them as separate (discrete) items. This is why the grading of structures cannot be as reliable as that of vocabulary items.

There is just one more aspect of language learning to be pointed out. Language, as we said earlier, cannot be divorced from situation. It is possible for a learner to use words and structures correctly, but use them in a wrong context. Appropriateness is as important as correctness. It becomes the teacher's responsibility, as he introduces the new words and structures, to indicate the situations and contexts in which they can or should be used. The situations of use can be selected and graded in the same way as the language. There has been for some time a great emphasis on 'situational' teaching, which requires the teacher to create, in the classroom, a situation which will make the use of the word or structure being taught seem natural and inevitable. Of course, the situations which can be created in the classroom are limited; in comparison to real life situations they are, at best, artificial and unconvincing. Nevertheless, they do enable the learner to see the relationship between situation and language. There are some teachers who feel that it may be better to use 'situational grading' than 'structural grading': that is, to first introduce those situations which are more likely to be frequent and useful for the learner, even if they should require the use of language patterns which are, grammatically, more complex than those used in other situations introduced later. Each set

of language patterns is, for the learner, associated with a certain kind of situation, which he himself is likely to encounter.

Starting from these general remarks about the content of language teaching—the words, the structures and the situations in which they are used—we shall go on to consider how these principles can be related to the needs and objectives for the teaching of English at the college level.

DESIGNING THE CURRICULUM

To repeat something said earlier: the first, and perhaps the most important, requirement for an effective language-teaching programme is being able to identify and state, explicitly and precisely, the targets to be achieved. One should be able to specify the language skills that are found to be relevant for the learner and also the quantum of language (the number of words and structures) which he needs.

It is not very helpful to talk about the language skills to be taught unless language ability can be quantified in terms of the extent of the vocabulary and grammar which the learner commands. For example, a learner may be able to understand, speak, read and write the language adequately within a range of 1500 words and the simplest grammatical structures; but when he is exposed to language outside this restricted range, the language skills show a sharp decline. The number of words and structures which the learner has acquired therefore sets a limit on the skills which he possesses; in drawing up a curriculum for a language course both these dimensions have to be considered. The targets for teaching thus form a grid or network, of which the skills and the content of language constitute the inter-locking parts, as shown in the diagram below:



A good syllabus should state its objectives specifically and quantitatively; it should be able also to justify the objectives which it chooses for itself, basing them on individual needs and social requirements. Above all, the objectives must be realistic and achievable.

In their syllabuses, most of the Indian universities are silent, or vague, about the exact nature of the skills and the amount of language which they want the student to learn. Boards of Secondary Education are more specific in this regard. In the past, the universities ignored language courses because they probably felt that the teaching of language skills was too elementary a function for them to consider: they were to be exclusively centres of 'higher' learning. Even if we were to assume that in the past a student entering college possessed all the skills of language which the situation demanded of him, this neglect cannot be justified. Any kind of instruction involving the use of language requires the development of some language skill or other. The breaking down of the skills into L-S-R-W is only a broad and rough kind of classification. At the higher levels, the skills involved become much more particular and delicate, but they are, nevertheless, recognizably language skills. For example, the study of literature, even at the highest level, involves the use of some highly refined and specialized skills of language, which we traditionally lump together under the broad and unhelpful label of 'literary sensibility'. What exactly do we mean by a literary sensibility? What is it that distinguishes the good student of literature from the mediocre? As yet, we have no precise answers to these questions, and it will need a thorough-going and delicate analysis of the procedures of literature teaching to reveal precisely what is 'learnt' by the student as their result. But there can be little doubt that some skill or skills are involved. Teachers of literature have always recognized that 'sensibility' is something that needs to be cultivated, or developed, through training; if this is so, a 'skills approach' to the teaching of literature would certainly be justified. In effect, this reduces the distinction that is maintained between the teaching of literature and that of language: one is seen as merely the extension of the other. As soon as one recognizes the existence of a sensibility or skill which (by definition) involves a process of training, the need for a planned approach to teaching becomes obvious.

There can thus be little justification for the cavalier manner in which college courses in English were traditionally conceived and

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presented, even on the ground that they were not language courses. Neither were they good literature or 'humanities' courses. No one knew clearly what they were intended to achieve; the only evidence of planning revealed in them was in the selection of authors and texts.

Today, there does not exist even this justification of assuming that a college-level course need not concern itself with basic language skills: clearly, their cultivation should be its chief objective.

The planning of teaching at any stage can never be done in isolation from the stages which precede and follow it. In the case of a language-teaching course, the targets selected (in terms of skills and language content) have to be dovetailed with the targets for the earlier stage. To use terms which are now fashionable, we say that the *entry level* for any stage must be consistent with the *terminal level* for the preceding stage; that is, if the learner has attained a certain level at the end of one stage, this level should serve as the 'take-off' for the succeeding stage. To illustrate concretely: supposing the learner has reached certain specified levels for each of the language skills within a limit of 2,500 words and 250 structures by the end of the school stage (after 6 years of learning English), this level should serve as the starting point for the next higher stage. The language exposure to be provided at the next stage—the college stage—must, *to begin with*, make no demand on the learner's language skills that he cannot meet on the basis of previous learning. Now, this language exposure will come from the texts prescribed for study as well as from the lectures delivered in class. Initially, therefore, the texts he is required to study should be controlled to the 2,500-word-250-structure limit; there should be no words or structures used, at first, that the learner has not previously encountered. (In actual practice, there always are some new words and structures in the texts provided, and within reasonable limits this is not only permissible but even desirable.) So also, the lecturer should exercise care not to use language which presents difficulties to the learner. From this entry level, the teaching programme should build up the learner's repertoire of words and structures to a pre-determined level in a planned and phased manner, and at the same time develop and train the relevant skills to suit the expanding linguistic range. (We can now say that there is no justification for the complaint, commonly made, that the standard of the students joining colleges is so low that they cannot understand

the lecturer. Whatever their standard, the teacher will have to accept this as the actual entry level, and adjust his teaching to it.)

We have considered one aspect of the entry level—the upper limit, which should not be unreasonably in excess of the terminal level for the preceding stage. Nor should the entry level fall short of that terminal level; there must be a lower limit as well. If a learner at the college level is exposed to language which is too easy for him, and offers him no challenges—either linguistic or intellectual—no new learning is going to take place. This point has to be borne in mind in prescribing texts for college students: texts which are too easy are worse than those which are a little too difficult. Furthermore, text material written to too low a language level (let us say, a 1,500-word, 150-structure limit) is unlikely to be interesting to a pupil at the college level.

Not only the entry level but also the terminal level for each stage has to be planned in advance. The linguistic level which the student is expected to attain by the end of a given period (say a year or two years) must be specified, as also the precise nature and extent of the skills expected of him. (See Appendix I to this book for some details.) This will depend on what the student is being prepared for. At the undergraduate (PUC or Intermediate) level, for example, a student may have a number of options ahead of him: he may be preparing himself for a professional course in medicine, engineering or agriculture; or, he may be planning to work for a general degree in the Sciences or Humanities. For each such eventuality the language requirement is likely to be different; the entry level for the next stage (whatever that is) will have to be reached, and this should serve as the target or terminal level. It follows that the same terminal level will not be relevant for *all* students. (We shall take up this point for discussion in the next chapter.)

We have, in the preceding paragraphs, discussed two of the important requirements for the successful planning of a language course: *Control* and *Co-ordination*. The first implies that whatever goes into the making of a language course (chiefly, the materials used to provide the necessary experience of language) should be subjected to a number of controls: linguistic, cultural, psychological, and so on. The entry level as well as the terminal level should be pre-determined and should serve as the limits for the course. (Sometimes, the terms 'entry behaviour' and 'terminal behaviour' are used to describe the level of the learner at entry and at the end of a

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course. This is due to the fact that, for quite some time, language learning has been seen as a form of acquired behaviour.)

The illustrations from the entry and terminal levels for the college stage relate to the principle of Co-ordination, which we have already discussed. Each part of a language-learning programme extending over a period of time, and phased into stages (e.g., primary school — middle school — secondary — undergraduate — degree — post-graduate), must be visualized in relation to the total programme, and not in isolation from the other stages. The entry and terminal levels for the succeeding stages must be carefully meshed. This is known as the *Vertical Integration* of a course.

Programmes of language teaching are generally cyclic in nature. It is not correct to think of any stage in the programme as just a linear extension of the previous stage. All new learning offered in the course of a programme has constantly to be re-visited, reinforced and consolidated before fresh territory can be annexed. (The cycle can be described as one of expansion—reinforcement—consolidation—expansion.) Language skills, like human muscles, wither away if not constantly exercised. The language-learning programme must be designed to provide the necessary exercise for skills already acquired as well as for their development over an expanding linguistic repertoire. It will thus be relevant at the college stage to revise language items learnt in school; but familiar items should be taken in conjunction with new items, so that learning is not purely repetitive. The design of the programme has to consider how much of the 'old' should be blended with the 'new'. This is the important principle of *Consolidation* in designing a language course.

The fourth principle—the fourth 'C' that we wish to talk about—is that of *Correlation*, or *Horizontal Integration*. This implies that all the elements or components of a language programme should, at any given stage, be brought together and taken up simultaneously according to a plan. For example, the important skills of language (L-S-R-W), being interrelated, have to be taken up together. (This is described as a 'multi-skill' approach.) The teaching of each skill may call for a different kind of learning experience or activity (e.g., reading a printed text, listening to a conversation or a talk, viewing a film or slide, writing a story, etc.), and the programme will have to combine together all the necessary kinds of activity. There will thus have to be a variety of teaching materials and techniques, each directed to a specific objective. Ultimately, it is the

combination of narrow objectives that makes a broad design possible. Language itself is a network, a highly complex system of inter-locking systems (the sound system (Phonology), the system for the combination of grammatical forms (Syntax), and the system by which the language expresses meanings (Semantics), to name only the broadest categories); although we itemize and break down the system of language into manageable 'chunks' for purposes of teaching, the interrelations can never be lost sight of. Each teaching point has to draw in other points of the language, directly and indirectly. All this has to be provided for in the design.

It will be apparent that planning a language course is not a simple matter of naming some texts for study and asking students to write a few essays and precis exercises from time to time. There are important considerations involved: sociological (Do we need the language? For what purpose? What kinds of communication?); linguistic (Which varieties or dialects of the language? Which registers? Which words and structures? How are the languages being learnt related?); psychological (How best to motivate the learner? What psychological principles apply to language learning?); pedagogical (What strategy is to be used for reaching the pre-determined goals? What materials and techniques to use? How best to order the course components? etc.) The design of the programme is revealed in the teaching materials as well as the teaching techniques; the design must specify *everything*.

The discussion above may help us in understanding better the deficiencies in the designing of courses for the teaching of English, particularly at the college level.

We should like to suggest, for the reader who may want to check if he has clearly understood the principles of curriculum construction, an exercise in the evaluation of the syllabus with which he is concerned as a teacher. The following are some of the guide-lines for use in making such an evaluation:

1. What stage of language learning does the programme (curriculum) relate to? (Middle School, Secondary, P.U.C., etc.)
2. What is known about the earlier stage or stages of language learning? (In other words, what is the entry behaviour?)
 - a How many years of English did the learner have?
 - b Roughly, how many hours of instruction did he have?
 - c What was the status of English at the earlier stage(s)? (medium of instruction; first, second or third language)

- d* What were the attitudes to English, among teachers and students, in the social context being considered?
 - e* What kinds of teachers were available? (Trained or not; qualifications; abilities)
 - f* Did the plan for the earlier stage(s) specify the objectives (the skills, the language items) to be taught?
 - g* Were the entry and terminal levels specified by the syllabus (in terms of skills and content)?
 - h* What kinds of learning experiences were provided? (reading of books, oral work, etc.)
 - i* What kinds of teaching materials (texts, supplementary readers, workbooks) were used? Were these controlled?
 - j* How was the level of learning at the end of the earlier stage assessed? (examination systems used).
- 3 Are the objectives for the programme which you are considering (or, the Desired Terminal Behaviour) stated clearly and precisely? [As in ii(f).] How far are the objectives desirable and feasible? Are the entry and terminal levels specified?
 - 4 How far is the programme for the stage you are considering co-ordinated with the earlier stages? Is there too much of a gap? Is the transition smooth?
 - 5 What is the amount of control? (linguistic, cultural)
 - 6 Does the programme allow for consolidation as well as expansion of language learning?
 - 7 Are the various parts of the language course correlated satisfactorily? (Are the various skills taught in an integrated manner? Is the learner able to get a synthetic view of the language?)
 - 8 Does the programme specify the teaching materials and teaching experiences to be used in teaching? Are these appropriate to the objectives stated?
 - 9 Does the programme specify the teaching techniques to be used? Does it attempt a justification of the materials and techniques that it recommends?
 - 10 Does the programme specify the system of examination and attempt to justify it? Is the system of examination related to the objectives of teaching?

In the light of these considerations, how would you rate the curriculum?

THE DIVERSIFICATION OF COURSES

It was said, in the last chapter, that each stage in the teaching of English has to be linked with the stages coming before and after it. However, in the present situation this has become very difficult, because at any given stage the levels of achievement may differ greatly from one group of students to another. There has been a great increase in the number of pupils in recent years, and one of the consequences is that in any given class of students, whether at the school or college level, the range of abilities in English is very wide. Some pupils come from homes where English is frequently used; others, from sections of society which have had no previous exposure to the language. Pupils enter school, therefore, with different entry behaviours in the language. Over the years, the differences in the levels of achievement become even more pronounced, and it is difficult for the teacher to reduce them.

In some States the teaching of English begins at the primary stage. There are other States where English is taught as a compulsory language for periods ranging from six to three years. In some States English is only an optional language; in others, although it is taught compulsorily, the student is not required to pass in English.

Students coming from different States and with various degrees of exposure to the English language may, however, feel the same need for English once they come to the college stage. Although English is not the medium of instruction at the college stage in most States, the student soon finds that he should have a certain proficiency in the language. At the higher levels, he may have to do most of his study through English. The medium of instruction at the most important centres of technical and professional education continues to be English. This is true particularly of institutions of a national character, such as the Indian Institutes of Technology. They may admit students coming from States where there is practically no teaching of English at the school level, and yet require them to follow lectures and answer all examinations in English.

This poses a real difficulty for the teacher of English at the undergraduate level. He finds that he must give the student, within a

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very short time, the proficiency in English that he is going to require when he comes to the next stage in the educational system (viz., the graduate, postgraduate, professional or technical stage). The teacher at the undergraduate level cannot escape his responsibility by saying that the language should have been taught at the school level, and that if this has not been done, he can do nothing about it. He has now to do a part of the teaching which used to be done at school. The task is not *infra-dig*; on the contrary, it is an important professional challenge which must be met.

The Study Group set up by the Government of India in 1965 has devoted a large part of its report (entitled *The Teaching of English*) to the problem of designing courses at the college level which would be appropriate to the situation obtaining today. It recommends the important principle of 'diversification of courses'. In the past, there commonly was only one general kind of course at each level, which had to be taken by all the students, irrespective of their levels of achievement and their needs for English. Students of Science, Commerce and the Humanities were given identical courses in English at the undergraduate level; the same textbooks were prescribed and the same examinations administered. Much of the syllabus was dominated by literature. Perhaps these general courses were meant to be language proficiency courses—that is, it was perhaps hoped that they would give the student a general, all round proficiency in the English language, which would be of use to him for whatever purpose he might need it later.

Many teachers feel that because the Indian student needs English for rather special and limited purposes today, there is no point in aiming at a general proficiency in all areas of the language, and in all the skills. They would prefer to restrict the objectives and to design different kinds of courses, each one meant for a highly specific purpose.

There may be two main parameters in the design of such 'limited objective' courses: the register to be used, and the skills to be concentrated on. Let us consider each in turn.

1. *Register-based courses*: We have already introduced the term 'register'. English has many special registers, related to particular professions or areas of study. It is possible for one to be very proficient in one particular register, but to have no proficiency whatever in another register. The student does not need to command any register except the one he is concerned with and, therefore,

he need only be exposed to the vocabulary and structures of this register. The exposure, however, should be fairly intensive, so that the student may feel quite at home in his own register.

This principle could be used in designing courses in English for students of Science, Technology, Commerce, Agriculture, Medicine, etc.

2. *Skills-based courses*: While a multi-skill approach may be preferable at the elementary levels, it may be desirable later to concentrate on the particular skill (or skills) which the learner needs, to the exclusion of the others. This will also apply to situations where a particular skill has to be rapidly established or developed.

Such a course could be particularly useful, let us say, to a student with a low entry-level who found that he needed English only for the purpose of reading reference books. He would be given a course which concentrated on this single skill. But if he joined a college where English was the medium of instruction, he would need a multiple-skills course.

It would be possible to design courses based on different combinations of registers and skills, so as to make the objectives very specific indeed. (For example, a reading course could be designed only for the register of Commerce.)

While the idea of courses designed to foster particular skills is acceptable to many, opinions are divided on the utility of register-based courses. Some designers of courses feel that if a student is proficient in the 'general service' core of the language, it will not be difficult for him to pick up the particular register of the language he needs. In any case, the difficulties in learning the English of Science or Technology, for example, are those caused by the *concepts* of Science or Technology, and not so much by the registers which embody them.

There is, however, a noticeable tendency today to provide different kinds of courses for students of different disciplines. The textbooks which are used contain materials drawn from the particular registers which the students are being taught, rather than literary materials. There is, of course, the possibility that materials of a very factual kind may be less interesting to the brighter student (who already has some proficiency in English) than literary writing. But for the majority of students, material related to their own field of study is more likely to be useful in mastering the relevant register.

The undergraduate stage is an educational bridge between the

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school stage and the higher stages of education. Recently, there has been a trend to replace the 11-year school pattern by a 10-year pattern, followed by a 2-year 'Intermediate' stage. This is probably a recognition of the fact that at the undergraduate level, students coming from different school systems and different States must be given the necessary preparation which will enable them to go on to the next higher stage. Proficiency in English is an important part of this preparation. The difference in the levels of achievement in English should be levelled out as far as possible. To this end, at many universities, *Bridge Courses* in English are being offered. As the name indicates, these courses are meant to be a bridge between the English acquired at school and the English needed for higher learning. Within a very short time, the student has to make the transition from the former to the latter. This involves a highly intensive kind of teaching of the English language. Sometimes, these courses are known as 'crash' courses, because they hope to achieve quick results.

In the first place, a freshman at college may have to *unlearn* some of the English which he was taught at school. This is more difficult than teaching him something new. Bad language habits, whether of speaking, reading or writing, are very difficult to get rid of but they must be eliminated before new learning can take place. A bridge course must, therefore, be largely a remedial course in English. We shall discuss this problem in a later chapter.

The other aim of a bridge course is to give the student the language skills as well as the language content which he needs to have. There has to be heavy emphasis on reading, but the other skills cannot be totally neglected. In a bridge course there must be a great deal of intensive language activity by the student—he may be required to do a lot of reading, and some speaking and writing, under the teacher's supervision. He may, sometimes, be exposed to several hours of English each day, thus getting as much exposure to English in about six weeks as he would normally get in about six months.

Such bridge courses are very often organized for students of Science, Commerce, Engineering, etc., *before* they begin the study of their main subjects. The aim is to give them, in advance, all the English which they are likely to need in the next year or two.

Another problem is that the same bridge course will not be useful to all the students in a college. As we have said already, some

students may have a much higher proficiency in English than others. If they were to be put on a bridge course along with the slower students, they would quickly lose all interest. So, even a bridge course may have to be organized on different levels. Usually, there are at least three different levels, meant for the above average, the average and the slow learners. They would be tested in advance to find out which course would be most suitable for them. However, once a student was put on a certain course, he would not necessarily have to remain on that course till the end. For example, a student who was put on an elementary course could be promoted to the next higher course very soon if the teacher found that he was making quick progress. This principle, which is known as the 'multiple-point entry principle' is very important in modern course design. Any system of instruction ought to be flexible. Students must be free to move from one course to another depending on their aptitude, ability, intelligence, interest and rate of learning. For example, some students might want special training in spoken English; they would perhaps be put on a course specially designed and tailored for them. But if neither they nor the teachers felt later that this course was what they really needed, it should be possible for them to move on to some other course. Some people feel that the student should have the option to decide which kind of course, out of a large number being offered, would be most useful to him.

It would certainly be difficult to design courses to cater to all kinds of needs and abilities, but the importance of this principle has to be recognized. The report of the second Study Group, to which we have referred, makes suggestions for several different kinds of courses at the college level. Even at the school level, it has been suggested, there can be two different 'streams' for the teaching of English. There would be a lower level, which would be compulsorily offered to all students, and where the objectives of teaching would be rather limited. There would also be a higher level to which only the better students, who showed the aptitude or the interest, would be admitted. This principle, however, is not acceptable to all teachers, because they feel that there should be no specialization at this stage. But the idea of introducing specialized courses in English at the undergraduate level is certainly becoming more and more popular. A lot of planning will have to go into the designing of these courses. We will have to be very clear about the objectives for each course, as well as the entry level and the terminal

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level for the students who would be admitted to each course. The teacher will have to rely on diagnostic tests which would tell him which course would be of most benefit to a particular student. Such tests are difficult to produce. It will be obvious, therefore, that we have a long way to go before we can really think of a wide diversification of courses. This is not really a problem for most teachers, who are seldom involved in the problems of course design. Most often, the teacher is simply given a programme which he has to carry out. But he must understand the implication and the objectives behind each kind of course that is offered.

STRATEGIES AND TECHNIQUES FOR THE TEACHER

Language Teaching Methodology is determined by several sets of considerations: chiefly, the linguistic, the psychological and the sociological. It consists as much in the selection of objectives, the planning of curricula, the designing of teaching materials as in the actual techniques employed by the teacher. (There is yet another facet of Methodology, equally vital, on which we shall have something to say presently: Testing.)

Probably the most significant advance in language teaching has been the emergence of what one might describe as 'the linguistic approach' to language and language learning — 'linguistic' in the sense that it has been influenced by some of the theoretical assumptions behind the science of linguistics, concerning the nature of language, its function in communication, the 'levels' of language, etc. The teaching and learning of language has, in fact, been broken down into a number of specific tasks. Just as linguistics emphasizes that language is not a monolith (a single, homogeneous block, constructed all in one piece) but is made up of a number of what we regard as 'discrete' or separate items, so also the new approach to language teaching is by a set of 'discrete' functions and processes. The more precise this analysis of what is involved in language teaching, the more scientific it becomes.

Linguistic considerations are important in enabling us to set up exact targets. If the objectives are to be realistic, however, they must be related to the needs and pressures experienced by the learner — and this is where socio-psychological considerations matter. A properly designed curriculum should ensure that learning does not become irrelevant and mechanical; it should provide the right challenges and the necessary rewards.

A teacher should be in a position to evaluate any text prescribed for any given English curriculum in terms of the language skills which it can be used to foster, the care exercised in the selection and gradation of language materials, its interest for the reader, and so on. The curriculum and the teaching materials are inseparable;

in most cases, the teacher has no indication of the objectives in the curriculum apart from the textbook. The textbook represents the curriculum in miniature. It is the only tool the teacher has, and it may, therefore, be the only 'method' at his disposal. This is particularly true of the situation obtaining in India today: the teacher often has so little insight into the nature of language learning and teaching that he is content with merely taking up the book and 'teaching' it from cover to cover.

But does this manner of 'teaching a textbook' result in students mastering language skills? We know that it does not. Is not the college teacher's task then so to use the textbook in class as to give his students the opportunity to practise and perfect those skills? The objective is to get them to use English to communicate. To achieve this objective, the learning of English has to be made much more of a two-way process in which the students participate as actively as the teacher himself. Mere listening on the part of the students is obviously not good enough.

Let us look at the kind of demand that the new relationship between the teacher and his students in the classroom makes on the teacher. He needs, and must develop, certain 'classroom skills' to be able to communicate effectively with his students. The technique of lecturing is a communication tool of dubious or, at most, limited value. Real communication is achieved by two (or more) parties, and the college teacher has to train his students not just to answer questions but also to ask them, to comment, to discuss and to argue. He must also see that communication is sustained; and, finally, he must make certain that such communication results in his students acquiring some language skills. In other words, a teacher of a language should possess, in addition to the actual skills of the language, the *professional* skill which will enable him to transmit the language skills to his students.

It is the teacher who ultimately activates the curriculum. Not even the most carefully designed teaching programme can succeed if the teacher fails to understand the underlying principles and relate his teaching practices to them. On the other hand, teaching techniques based on sound principles can go a long way in making up for a poor curriculum, unsuitable textbooks and examinations. When all the elements in the language teaching system cry out for reform, it is clear where the highest priority should lie: in improving the quality of classroom teaching. As a rule, the practising

teacher complains that he cannot do anything unless the syllabus, the texts and the examinations are improved. The point is: there has to be a beginning somewhere!

Much of the time and effort involved in the teaching of English results in 'wastage'. This points to a flaw in the system rather than in the learner. As we have said already, an overhaul of the entire system is called for—but there *is* something which can be done, as a short-term measure perhaps, by the teacher in the classroom. But he must want to do something for the student. He will also need plenty of courage, determination and patience, for he is bound to find his work frustrating at first. He must stimulate his students to make the effort necessary to learn: in short, make them work. The average student has grown so accustomed to *not* working, to merely watching his lecturer 'perform', that at first he is likely to resent any attempt at making him work. The mere demand upon his attention may be resented. But the teacher *has* to make the student realize that he *can* learn, can achieve something, and that whatever he learns can be of help to him, at least in passing the examination, even if he is unable to see the long-term benefits. It may be (as is alleged) that in India teaching serves only one purpose—the passing of examinations. This is regrettable, but the clever teacher can make use of the motivating power that examinations may provide in order to do some useful teaching! It should be possible for him to serve two masters at once—to teach for the examination as well as to teach some English.

There is no short-cut to language learning. The gift of language cannot be bestowed; it has to be earned. The language skills are acquired only by practice. If there is no practice by the student there will be no learning.

We have seen why the 'behaviourists' believe that the learner should be permitted to produce only the correct response to any given stimulus—that the student should never be allowed to make a mistake. Practice of this kind must be severely controlled; the student may get no opportunity for free expression until it is certain that he will commit none of the anticipated errors. (The word 'anticipated' is important; the teacher is expected to be able to predict the areas where mistakes are likely to occur, on the basis of his experience with other students, or his knowledge of the areas where the mother tongue is likely to influence the use of the target language.) Controlled practice consists in taking the student over

one area of difficulty at a time, totally avoiding the other areas (e.g., the use of the definite article only, ignoring the pitfalls of tense, etc.), and making use largely of drills.

One school of thought, which seems to be popular now, emphasizes the value of creative, free use of language by the learner, even if this involves committing errors. The learner's errors, it is said, furnish evidence that a certain pattern of learning is being formed, and the teacher can make constructive use of this evidence. Moreover, too severe a form of control may inhibit the creative faculty which is largely responsible for success in language learning.

We will not go now into the relative merits of these theories. It does seem more practicable to control the students' efforts by limiting the number of areas where errors could be made and progressively allowing him freedom in the use of language. This gives him a greater chance of achieving success and thus builds up his confidence.

Teaching a learner the skills of language is comparable to teaching a child how to walk. At first the mother holds the child firmly by the hand, then progressively relaxes her grip until she feels that the child is ready for its first independent step. The relaxation of control is gradual but inevitable; without it the child would never learn to walk. The same thing should happen in language learning: the teacher should lead the student along—prompting, directing, guiding and encouraging him. Progressively, the tasks for the learner should become more and more challenging, the help less and less direct, until it is withdrawn altogether.

In some of the subsequent chapters we shall discuss the actual techniques which teachers of English may use in the classroom. We do not wish to lay down any rigid or dogmatic set of procedures. Ultimately, the teacher must decide what is best for the classroom—but he must not deviate from the objectives. Any technique which produces the desired results is good, and there can always be more ways than one of doing a thing. However, the teacher will find it helpful to remember the following:

1. No matter what is prescribed, the teacher's aim is to see that his students learn English—that is, they acquire the skills of the language.
2. Language skills are acquired mainly through use. One does

- not learn how to speak, read or write a language only by listening to it: one has to read it, speak it and write it.
- 3 The only evidence for the teacher that his students are learning is the ability which they display in understanding, speaking, reading and writing.
 - 4 Since the teacher teaches for the student to learn, the latter should determine the level and pace of teaching.
 - 5 The teacher must communicate with his students, in language which they can understand. He must, in the first place, come down to their level, and learn to deliberately control his language in the same way as the writer of a textbook.
 - 6 Any technique, no matter how successful, leads to boredom and fatigue if resorted to constantly. Classroom teaching must not become a ritual to be observed at all costs. It must be imaginative, creative and flexible. It should be a blend of different approaches. Variety of techniques is an integral part of Methodology.

Although we have emphasized student activity, there can be no objection to the use of lecturing by the teacher if the situation requires it, or as a form of relief from the normal routine. Lecturing is certainly useful for imparting information, and although the formation of language skills is not normally related to the acquiring of information, the teacher will sometimes have to make use of this technique. Lecturing—'telling the student'—may be a useful shortcut when learning is slow. But it must be used judiciously, and in small doses.

It is necessary for the teacher to make an assessment of himself during and after each class. He must ask himself: Did learning take place in the class? Was he able to communicate? Did he get the necessary feedback? Was the class interesting?, etc. Normally, if the teacher is not smug, he will be able to form a pretty fair estimate of his own teaching.

The actual technique will, of course, depend on and arise out of the content that is being taught. Prose, poetry and drama have to be handled differently: texts for detailed study are taught differently from those intended for non-detailed study. We shall discuss, in the chapters following, the techniques for each kind of teaching.

10

PLANNING THE LESSON

In planning a lesson the teacher should have an absolutely clear idea of both the long-term and the immediate objectives. Each lesson must constitute an advance over the last, and lead on to the next.

The considerations which should weigh with the teacher in delimiting his objectives are:

- 1 the part of the syllabus which has to be taught;
- 2 the language skills to be built into the teaching;
- 3 the linguistic levels involved: the grammar, vocabulary (active and passive) and phonology; and
- 4 any useful 'extra-linguistic' information to be given.

Ideally, the skills-oriented teaching of English should not be tied down to a set of prescribed texts, because the danger is that teaching the text may become the end in itself, and not the means. This is precisely what has happened today. In a more enlightened set-up, the teacher would be free to use only texts or materials he liked in order to teach the skills; the examination would test only the skills, and not the content of the texts.

However, texts have to be taught, and the students have to be prepared for the examination.

The syllabus will usually combine 'literature' with 'language' (the actual proportions may vary). It is not always clear to the framers of the syllabus how the various parts of it will contribute to the growth of the language skills; but the teacher, at least, must be able to 'squeeze out' some relevant skill from every component of the course. This may well be the most difficult task facing him: even an essay by Francis Bacon can be exploited for building up useful language skills, but this takes some planning!

Each lesson, while having the teaching of some skill(s) and a related part of the language as the objective, will have to be planned around a part of the syllabus—in most cases, around some part of a prescribed text.

The following is an attempt at relating the parts of a typical undergraduate English syllabus to the language objectives:

- 1 Prose: fiction, essay, drama (for detailed study)

- Language objectives:* reading skills and comprehension;
summarizing;
note-taking;
writing skills;
grammar and lexis;
speech skills (incidental).
- 2 Poetry: non-dramatic and dramatic
Language objectives: comprehension and appreciation;
speech skills.
- 3 Prose texts for non-detailed study
Language objectives: reading skills and comprehension (fast
reading, 'skimming', etc.);
writing skills;
lexis (mostly passive).
- 4 Composition: paragraph writing, expansion
Language objectives: writing skills.
- 5 Grammar: parts of speech, analysis, transformations, etc.
Language objective: learning how the language works.
- 6 Précis or substance
Language objectives: summarizing;
writing skills.
- 7 Translation
Language objectives: strictly speaking, the skill involved is not
a language skill. The use of translation for teaching lan-
guage is of doubtful value; but the objectives which can be
built in are:
comprehension;
writing skills;
grammar and lexis.

The objectives listed above are the general objectives in teaching language. The teacher must also define the specific objective for each lesson thus: (i) the skills he hopes to develop through the lesson; (ii) the specific areas of grammar and items of vocabulary he intends to teach; (iii) the extra-linguistic objectives, if any, that he wishes to achieve (cultural, informational, etc.).

In addition to the objectives, the teacher should define the assumed 'entry behaviour' of his students. He should set himself a definite stage or level from which to begin his lesson. In order to test whether his assumptions about the entry behaviour are correct, he should devote some time, before he begins teaching, to the

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review of previous learning. This is done by putting brisk, probing questions to his students, to test their memory as well as understanding. (The exact questions to be asked must be planned in advance.)

If the entry behaviour of the students is found to be as assumed, the teacher may begin his lesson; but there is no point in teaching something new if the previous learning is found to be defective or inadequate.

The main principle in planning a lesson is that the teacher should be able to anticipate or predict the way in which his students are apt to 'behave' at any point, and give himself a set of options as to what he should do in each case. He should be able to tell himself in advance: 'I expect the students, at this point, to do *X*, and in that case I shall do *A*; but if, on the other hand, the students do *Y*, I shall do *B*.' It should not be necessary to throw a plan overboard merely because the unexpected happens: all this should, as far as possible, be anticipated and provided for in the plan.

Before the 'body' of the lesson begins, the students should be properly motivated to receive it. The initial review may serve this purpose; but the teacher might have to set the stage for the new lesson either by explaining to his students what he is about to do or by providing an anecdote or illustration which is relevant to what he is doing. An introduction is not always necessary: if it is, it should be made brief, relevant and striking.

Some people insist that it is essential, at the outset, for the teacher to reveal to the class his objectives for that particular lesson. There may be some validity in this: the class may be able to see the lesson in better perspective if they know in advance the point to which they are being led; the lesson acquires a structure and a form, which makes things more comprehensible.

On the other hand, the students may lose interest in the lesson if the teacher reveals the 'conclusion' at the very outset. Sometimes the element of suspense is necessary. The teacher will therefore have to decide if an introduction is required at all, and the form that it should take.

The introduction is followed by the main presentation, or exposition. This is where the teacher begins to work towards the objectives defined by him earlier.

This may commence with some activity by the class (e.g., the silent reading of a passage for comprehension), or with some acti-

vity by the teacher (e.g., the reading aloud of a poem, to bring out its rhythm, structure, etc.). There can be no prescription here. In general, the teacher should do less of the talking and get his students to do more of it. Learning becomes a process of discovery, with the teacher only indicating the contours to be followed. One might think of this approach as teaching through questioning. (A fuller discussion of this will follow in a subsequent chapter.)

Presentation is followed by exercise. Questions may be asked, not (this time) to elicit answers which may lead up to new learning, but to reinforce, consolidate and extend what the class has already learnt.

For instance, in a grammar lesson, the teacher may first ask his students questions which will lead them to discover the grammatical principles involved. This is a part of the presentation. For consolidation, he may ask his students to use the knowledge that they have gained by applying it to some other situation.

The following illustration may make this clear: suppose the teacher is explaining the use of the Simple Present Tense. Instead of lecturing on this he provides a number of examples; e.g.,

Birds fly away to warm climates in winter.

She returns home at six in the evening.

The teacher may ask: What kind of adverbial expression could be used with words like 'fly', 'returns', etc.?

Answer: 'Always', 'generally', etc.

Question: What kind of 'action' is indicated by such words ('fly', 'returns')?

Answer: Habitual action.

Exercise: Which form of the verb should be used in the following sentence?

'He..... (drink) tea every evening, but this morning he (drink) coffee.'

The exercise does serve as a test of learning, but its purpose is to reinforce, not assess, what has been learnt. So the phase of consolidation is accompanied by explanation, further elucidation, elaboration and illustration. The teacher must ensure that the new learning introduced by him has, in fact, been transmitted to the student.

So far, all questioning (and replies) may be assumed to have been oral. The impression of the spoken word should, in nearly all cases, be strengthened kinaesthetically by presenting the same learning in

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the written form. This could be done by giving the students a home assignment involving the application of the new learning. Again, the purpose is to establish rather than to test. The teacher should not, normally, ask his students to produce any written work which he has no intention of checking; but even if he is unable, for some reason, to correct what the students write, the mere exercise of writing is helpful.

The next stage may be that of recapitulation. The teacher re-constructs the entire lesson with the help of his students, making a concise summary of the main points covered. Like any other stage in the lesson, this requires the exercise of the teacher's discrimination: there may, for example, be no point in *summing up* a lesson where very little new learning has been introduced. Again, oral discussion should be followed by written work.

The last stage of all is that of evaluation. The purpose here is to test whether learning has, in fact, taken place; if it has not, the entire lesson, or part of it, may need to be repeated.

Let us now sum up all that we have said about lesson planning:

1 *Objectives*

- (i) General objectives linked up with the teaching of each part of the course: prose, poetry, grammar, *précis*, etc.
- (ii) *Specific objectives*: The particular skill(s), areas of grammar, vocabulary, to be introduced.
- (iii) Any other objectives (extra-linguistic).

2 *Review of previous learning* (through questions)

3 *Presentation*

- (i) The questions to be asked.
- (ii) The knowledge or information to be given.

4 *Exercise*

- (i) Orally.
- (ii) Through written work.

5 *Summing up* (as for 4)

6 *Evaluation*.

METHODS AND TECHNIQUES FOR INCULCATING LANGUAGE SKILLS IN LARGE CLASSES

The skills of language, we have said already, are acquired through practice. Such acquisition cannot be quick if the practice is haphazard. For example, a person who migrates to another country and is forced to speak the language used there learns to do so only gradually: he begins slowly to recognize the sounds peculiar to that language, he then begins to imitate them, and finally succeeds in producing them, though not always accurately! But if he takes lessons, the whole process of learning becomes directed; the teacher tells him what to do, shows him how to produce the necessary sounds and how to put words together; and he may be able to learn much faster. So, mere practice in the use of language is not enough—the student needs *directed practice*.

How much of this can the teacher provide in a large class?

Obviously, not very much. Students who are being trained to speak English effectively, or to write correctly and precisely, need individual attention. It is possible, however, for a teacher to provide practice to a large group or class in listening or reading, provided that the listening or reading is done with a purpose, a very different thing from mere passive listening or reading. This point needs to be elaborated.

When one is listening to someone, or reading a piece of text, one may have to:

- 1 recognize and identify the 'content' of the *message*, i.e., the given 'facts';
- 2 connect the facts in some kind of logical sequence;
- 3 isolate the more important or central facts from the peripheral or irrelevant parts of the message;
- 4 *infer* other facts on the basis of those given;
- 5 infer the *attitude* (which may only be implied) of the speaker or writer, from what is given;
- 6 react to the message in some normative way, i.e., judge whether

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what is said is sincere, truthful, valuable, useful, attractive, etc.

This complex (and complete) response to a piece of language has to be cultivated, and this is what a good listener or a good reader must be trained to develop. If the listener or reader is warned, in advance, that these are the capacities he is expected to develop, the activity of listening or reading becomes directed, purposive.

A simple illustration may be useful here. Suppose the teacher reads out, at normal speed, the following sentence to his class:

'In Delhi, I have a sister who is five years older than me, and also a seventeen-year old brother who is exactly half my age.'

The questions which might emerge out of this are:

- (i) How old is the speaker? (34)
- (ii) How old is his sister? (39)
- (iii) Where does the speaker's brother live? (Delhi)

In order to answer these questions, one must listen attentively, remember accurately what has been said, and be able to infer the answers to the questions.

Because of the repeated mention of ages, one might be prepared for questions of the type (i) and (ii), but not, perhaps, of the type (iii); one is likely to miss the signal ('and also') which provides the answer to (iii). The listener should therefore be trained to look for all possible signals.

The test of listening becomes, as it does here, a test of one's knowledge of English grammar as well as a test of memory and general intelligence. This is also true of reading.

We have already explained (in the section on *Objectives*) why these two skills are specially useful for the Indian student today, particularly the skill of reading. Listening may be a skill necessary for certain situations only: say, in the case of students exposed to lectures in English.

Practice in listening and reading must not only be directed, but also varied. A student may get so used to one kind of speech or writing that he finds it difficult to adjust himself to any other. In the case of listening, one has to learn to understand speakers with different varieties of pronunciation, (even those with speech defects), or speakers who possess certain distracting mannerisms. So also, in the case of reading, one has to learn to grapple with different styles of communication, different conventions of spelling, punctuation, and even syntax. An American textbook should not present insur-

mountable difficulties to a student of engineering because of the differences in the use of English; nor should an American professor at an I.I.T. be unintelligible to his Indian students.

A good listener or a good reader should be trained to make an informed or intelligent guess when he comes across something that he cannot immediately understand: he should not give up the attempt to understand. If he knows, from his experience of the language, what to expect, it is easier for him to make a guess. This involves a great deal of exposure to communication in that language; more simply, practice in listening and reading, which only the teacher can provide today.

At present most college courses are so overloaded with prescribed texts that the lecturer finds absolutely no time for providing practice in the elementary skills; he is expected (by his students, at any rate) to read the texts aloud to them, paraphrase, annotate, gloss—and then dictate notes for the examination. Ideally, the syllabus should provide for practice in listening and reading, and these skills should be tested in the examination; but is there anything the lecturer can do in the existing circumstances?

In general, the good teacher is one who makes himself progressively unnecessary for his students. Much of the classroom time spent in the exposition of texts could be saved if the teacher:

- 1 prepared and distributed hand-outs (preferably cyclostyled) containing brief introductions, glosses, annotations, summaries, etc., as an aid to, but not a substitute for, independent study of the text by the student (outside the classroom);
- 2 insisted on students reading assigned portions of the text before coming to the class;
- 3 confined his teaching of the text in the classroom to those passages which were particularly difficult (linguistically or intellectually) or particularly teachable (that is, lent themselves easily to stimulating classroom discussion, etc.). The teacher would, however, have to provide the links between different parts of the text, as well as some critical commentary; but his burden would certainly be greatly reduced.

The time thus saved could be utilised in providing more practice in purposive listening and reading, with the latter not necessarily confined to the prescribed texts. The teacher would need to build up a stock of materials which he could use in class: passages culled from books, newspapers, periodicals, journals; taped materials,

(which would provide a variety of voices), etc. There is already an abundance of such materials available; catalogues listing them are regularly published by Oxford University Press and Longman (to mention only two publishers whose names are familiar in India).

It has been said that the manner in which language classes are organized—students sitting stiffly on benches, row upon row, facing the lecturer but separated from him by firm barriers—is not conducive to any kind of student participation in the learning-teaching process. The lecture theatre should be replaced by a less formal (and forbidding) kind of classroom arrangement, possibly with students free to arrange themselves in small groups for discussion or joint participation in some task, etc. Since it is not possible for a lecturer to teach every one of his students individually (which would be the ideal situation), he should try to teach them in groups: this is what Jean Forrester mainly proposes in *Teaching Without Lecturing*.^{*} In each group there should be (and usually is) one student who can act as group leader because of his superior language skills; he can co-ordinate and direct group activity, provide the moderation, correction, etc. Even when all the students in a group are at the same level of ability, they do serve as checks on each other's performance: a student is usually quick in pointing out a mistake made by a 'peer' (a fellow student of comparable level), even if he be prone to make the same mistake himself. When students are asked to collaborate in some activity, they become more alert, possibly because of the element of competition, which is felt very tangibly. Ideas flow readily, and there is less shyness and inhibition.

Practice of the active skills—speaking and writing—can certainly be done more effectively in groups. The teacher can, for example, ask a group to jointly prepare a topic for a debate. Each member should contribute to the discussion, which must be in English, the teacher interfering only when necessary: it is better to get students to talk freely in English before one attempts to correct pronunciation and grammar. Some of this correction can come from the group itself, and the teacher can, if possible, devote some time to the task of explaining and demonstrating the principles of effective speech: phonetic accuracy (the production of the correct sounds and sound patterns), grammatical accuracy, and contextual accuracy (knowing what to say in a given situation). The skill of speaking in English is the most difficult to inculcate since it needs the greatest amount

^{*}Jean Forrester: *Teaching without Lecturing* (Oxford University Press).

of interaction between teacher and pupil; also, it is becoming a skill with fewer and fewer uses. The best strategy may be to introduce optional courses in spoken English for those who feel they need the skill. Often, a student may realize his need for it only after he has taken his degree and been in work. Extra-curricular activities like debating and dramatics should be encouraged, if only as an excuse for providing practice in Spoken English.

Finally, we come to the teaching of writing. Again because of sheer numbers, the college lecturer will rarely be able to provide (either in quantity or quality) the practice needed for improving this skill. Students have to be made to write often, and on a variety of topics, but unless their errors are pointed out to them immediately, more practice will only mean more errors committed, and this may be a bad thing psychologically. It is far better for students to write very short pieces of careful free composition which receive full attention than to produce an unmanageable amount of writing which cannot be scrutinized at all. Many students may not be competent to be launched on free composition (we shall discuss elsewhere how they should be prepared gradually for the plunge), but a little free composition should be regularly produced by every student if his teachers are to discover those areas of general weakness on which composition teaching needs to be concentrated.

Here again, if a piece of composition is assigned to a group, rather than to each individual in the group, it becomes unnecessary for the teacher to correct each student separately. While this method falls short of the ideal, it certainly provides for more practice in composition than is possible now.

The teacher's task is greatly simplified if his students can make use of self-instructional or *programmed materials*. Basically, these are course books designed in such a way that a student can work through them entirely, or largely, on his own. This design, or programme, follows much the same strategy as any good teacher: it analyses and specifies the exact point from which it begins as well as the point at which it ends, and does this in clear linguistic terms. The entire area of learning to be covered is broken up into small incremental steps. Each step in the learning process is presented to the student in the shape of a *frame*, which typically consists of a piece of exposition or explanation, followed by a problem which the student must solve. The correct answer is provided, so that the student gets confirmation before he can go on to the next frame; however, he

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is expected not to look at the correct answer before he writes down his own. If the student makes an error, the programme explains to him why it is an error, and he may be asked to go through a number of additional frames before he comes to the one which he would have reached next if his answer had been correct. Thus the student works through all the stages of the programme—advancing, practising, revising, recapitulating, advancing again—till he comes to the end of the programme. Since no learner is supposed to go on to a succeeding stage until he masters the previous one, the programme ensures that the objectives proposed are, in fact, achieved.

The programme may be printed or taped (or both), and it may be used for teaching any one of the language skills. The great advantage is that it allows each student to learn at his own pace—something which is not possible in a classroom. The disadvantage, often crippling, is that it does not provide the human interaction which many learners find essential. Another disadvantage is that it may be an 'uneconomical' method of teaching: very little positive advance in learning may result from a great many frames.

No programme can replace a teacher completely, but it certainly spreads out the effect of good teaching more evenly. This applies also to the use of radio, television and other mass media, which may be used in teaching language skills to large classes.

To sum up: the college lecturer has to accept the fact that conditions for learning the language skills in class will be far from ideal. To compensate for this, and for the lack of individual supervision, the student will need to work more diligently, on his own, outside the hours when he receives classroom teaching. The teacher's success will depend on the extent to which he can motivate, promote and supervise this effort on the student's part.

TEACHING THE READING SKILLS

The importance of reading in any programme for the teaching of English in this country should be apparent. Indeed, all the arguments usually advanced for retaining English in India could be arguments in favour of teaching people how to read effectively in that language.

Of all the communication skills reading has probably the greatest 'serviceability', or general usefulness. Any user of a second language, in a modern society, is likely to find that reading is the skill which is most indispensable, and which he is called upon to use most frequently. Moreover, reading has high 'surrender value'. This means that in teaching people to read we can achieve several desired objectives at the same time. First, it can accelerate the process by which the patterns of a new language are mastered (although we have said that we are not sure about the precise nature of this process). The learner has necessarily to be exposed to the language, and reading is one of the most reliable and effective means of providing the exposure. It should not, of course, be the only source: a multi-channel, multi-sensory exposure is preferable to a single kind of exposure. The printed word should be reinforced and complemented, in a good language teaching programme, by other kinds of sensory experience: tapes, records, pictures, films, etc. But too often these complementary teaching devices and procedures are not available, for a variety of reasons, and the language teacher is thrown back on an exclusive reliance on printed materials. To be sure, a surprising amount of language learning can and does take place through reading alone. It is, therefore, quite appropriate for reading to form the core of a language-teaching programme.

Beyond its usefulness as a language-learning device, reading has immense educative value. Independent reading activity promotes intellectual growth and self-reliance.

What, exactly, is involved in learning to read?

Reading has been described as a process of 'sight-sound-sense'. It involves, first, the recognition of printed or written symbols and then the attachment of meanings to them so as to get the 'message'.

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At the earlier stages, reading involves the mastery of certain mechanical (physical) operations; but once the 'mechanics' of reading have been mastered, it becomes a process of 'thinking under the stimulus of the written page'.

Let us analyse these two aspects (the mechanical and the intellectual) of the reading skill and list the constituent abilities that go into reading.

1 Word-recognition Skills

(i) 'Sight-recognition', which means becoming familiar with the 'shapes' of words in print, so that the eye can take in several words at a glance.

(ii) 'Phonics', which leads to learning the correspondence between spellings and their realization in terms of sounds. Though English is allegedly 'unphonetic', one can learn to predict, to some extent, the pronunciation of unfamiliar words by relating them to known words.

(iii) 'Word-analysis', or learning to guess the probable meanings of words by relating them to known prefixes, stems and suffixes. At a slightly different level, one can learn to guess the meanings of words by relating them to the grammatical structure in which they occur.

(iv) 'Reading in sense groups'. Familiarity with the grammatical patterns and conventions of punctuation should lead to an ability to cut up sentences into inter-related groups of words. The unit of reading is thus the group, and not the individual word. (For example, in the sentence, 'All things considered / it may be best for us to concentrate on these two activities / since they involve little expenditure', there are three main sense groups, which we have marked off by slanting lines.) The eye of the reader should, with practice, be able to make these divisions easily and take in the sentence as a series of sense groups.

At a still higher level, the unit of reading becomes the sentence, or a group of sentences dealing with a single idea.

Some of the common faults which the learner has to overcome in mastering the mechanics of reading are:

- pointing at the words with a finger or pencil;
- unconscious head movement;
- vocalization: mumbling each word as it is read;
- lip movement;
- subvocalization;

seeing one word per 'fixation'; inefficient eye-movement; short span of recognition; and

regression: backward movement along a line.

2 Skills of Comprehension

(i) The skill of deriving meanings from known vocabulary and structures, contextual clues and derivations.

(ii) The ability to read at different rates (100 words to 600 words per minute).

(iii) The ability to vary the degree of comprehension—from complete absorption of all detail to the noting of the main points (90% to 50%).

(iv) The ability to skip and skim intelligently.

(v) The ability to combine reading at various speeds.

(vi) The ability to think selectively during the process of reading, relate significant statements, distinguish between facts and comments.

(vii) The ability to read between and beyond the lines—infer and interpret.

(viii) The ability to anticipate events and arguments and actively respond to the text.

(ix) The habit of using the dictionary.

In addition, the reader should have the ability to develop general strategies of his own, adapting the above skills according to the needs of the situation (purpose for which the material is being read and the nature of the material).

It is obvious that reading is not one skill but a composite of many specific skills, and that a good reader responds actively to the printed page. He has a plan of attack in his mind—a 'set', or state of mental preparedness—for the kind of material he is reading. For instance, when reading fiction, first he wants to find out the who, where, when, what, why and how, anticipate events and try to get the sequence of happenings and relationships clear in his mind. An efficient reader keeps his thoughts separate from the author's thoughts. He compares notes, and sometimes the author's thoughts start a chain of fresh ideas in his mind. A competent reader's mind is active: he thinks and feels as he reads.

The first group of skills comprising the mechanics of reading are normally taught at school. 'Intensive or detailed' and 'extensive or non-detailed' reading programmes at the high school level aim at teaching and training many of the skills included in 'the skills of

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comprehension'. However, experience and research suggest that most of the school-leavers have not mastered the mechanics of reading. They read slowly, and many read silently at as slow a pace as if they were reading aloud. They comprehend badly and have far too small a recognition vocabulary for useful or enjoyable reading. They have no experience whatsoever of independent reading. This is so because 'detailed' reading is done laboriously and painfully, with a great deal of help from the teacher, while the 'non-detailed' reading is either done perfunctorily or not at all. Reading is thus a neglected aspect of English teaching in our schools, paradoxical though this may seem in the context of the 'reading' method commonly used by English teachers. Indeed, students find reading so difficult and distasteful that for examination requirements they rely more heavily on the notes dictated by the teacher than on their personal reading of prescribed texts. When forced to read independently, they read at 50 words per minute and with 35% comprehension—an appallingly low standard of efficiency.

The least we can expect our college students to do is: (i) to acquire all the basic skills of reading, and exercise them with intelligence and imagination, and (ii) to achieve moderate speed and the required degree of comprehension.* Independent reading for comprehension is what the college programme should be concerned with.

As mentioned in an earlier chapter, the student should, at the end of the degree course, be able to read unsimplified texts in modern English without assistance. There should be a balance between rapid reading and close attentive reading. Also, there should be proper distribution of attention to different varieties of written English: narrative, descriptive, argumentative, artistic, scientific. The aim is to prepare the student to do such general reading as is necessary in his day to day life, and also such close, attentive reading as may be necessary for professional purposes.

What are the implications of this aim in terms of materials, methods and the examination?

Perhaps the most important single factor which can improve the situation is to prescribe more and varied reading materials, as well as to ensure that the various requirements of reading are reflected

* Edward Fry, in his *Teaching Faster Reading*, mentions three speeds and three corresponding levels of comprehension. We should, to begin with, aim at achieving the lower limits of comprehension and speed. (Fry's Chart, p. 52)

in the final examination. Ultimately, one learns to read by reading. Efficient methods of guiding student reading are available and can be adapted to suit a given situation. But let us first consider the question of reading materials.

Our effort at the pre-degree level should, therefore, be directed towards achieving a two-fold purpose: (i) consolidating the reading skills acquired at school, and (ii) helping students to achieve the transition from controlled materials to uncontrolled, unsimplified materials. As such, we need the following types of materials:*

- 1 Reading passages on a variety of interesting topics written within a vocabulary of 2,000 to 2,500 words, with a number of comprehension and vocabulary exercises and the necessary amount of glossing.
- 2 Reading passages on Social Sciences and Physical Sciences within a vocabulary of about 3,500 words. The materials will have to be liberally glossed and include comprehension and vocabulary exercises.
- 3 Unsimplified selections from modern prose. These will be heavily glossed and contain generous editorial help.

At the degree level where independent rapid reading and reading for professional purposes are the predominant objectives, the following types of materials will have to be provided:

- 1 Prose anthologies of contemporary writing, representing the major varieties of style (formal, semi-formal, informal) and register (literary, scientific, journalistic, belonging to the Social Sciences).
- 2 Texts for non-detailed study in order to develop reading speed and comprehension. Contemporary novels, modern plays and collection of short stories may be selected for non-detailed study.

All these materials should have adequate glosses and notes, and language exercises.

In selecting reading materials the language used must receive careful consideration. The material should offer representative samples of contemporary writing. It is certainly a challenging task to combine language requirements with considerations of maturity, interest and motivation of students.

*It is not suggested that only one book of each type be prescribed. Indeed 3 or 4 books of the first type are highly desirable for launching the students on the reading of unsimplified prose.

Surely students would be more strongly motivated by writings which treat the contemporary scene—sociological, cultural and scientific—than the writings of earlier periods. The tradition which insists on the uncritical inclusion of material written in the nineteenth and earlier centuries is open to serious question. If the cultural background is exotic and outlandish, the student is unduly puzzled by the behaviour of the characters about whom he is reading and his ability to deduce meaning from the context is impeded. Besides, when the student reads texts with outmoded vocabulary and syntax, we can expect him—the better student, at any rate—to assimilate some of these elements and speak and write stilted, pseudo-literary English.

It will be easily admitted that today not many university syllabuses prescribe appropriate kinds of reading materials. The deficiencies of these syllabuses are well known and they should be suitably modified in the light of the above requirements.

When a proficient, well-educated person reads it is, essentially, a personal, individual activity, with the reader working by himself, for himself, at his own rate and in his own way. Yet we find that much of the teaching which goes on in B.A. classes assumes that a student cannot be trained to read for himself or by himself and, what is worse, encourages him to believe that this assumption is true. All too often a period devoted to a text is purely one of interpretative activity on the part of the lecturer, whereas the main business of teaching reading is to make reading an interpretative activity on the part of the student. The lecturer explains difficult words and phrases, many of which could be interpreted by the students themselves, if they had the right reference material and had been trained to use it. Then the lecturer explains the most important ideas and the general gist of the text. All too often the students rely upon the lecturer's version of the text, and not on the text itself, as the basis of an examination answer. As an alternative, or a supplement, they may rely on bazaar notes which, for commercial reasons, are written and produced in extreme haste, are usually in bad English, and contain many misprints and even misinterpretations of the texts prescribed.

In teaching, whatever the method or subject, one principle should constantly predominate: let the teacher do nothing for the student that the student can do for himself. This has to be borne in mind especially in teaching reading skills. The essence of good

reading is its privacy and independence, and the development of this independence should constantly engage the teacher's attention.

Most college lecturers complain that they find it hard to work through the syllabus, largely because teaching the prescribed texts occupies so much of their time—they may find this in spite of the fact that our reading syllabuses are much lighter than they should ideally be. The answer lies in making students do much of their reading of the texts at home or in a library, in their own time. Students should, therefore, have their own copies of a dictionary and use them constantly.

Unfortunately, this situation does not exist today. As such we have to provide other types of assistance. The commonest type of assistance provided is that which consists of the teacher's supplying the meaning of a word not likely to be generally understood. We all do it, and we shall all go on doing it to some extent, because it is often necessary and unavoidable. The fact remains that this is often an exceedingly unfortunate type of assistance.

It is much harder than is generally realized to compose a definition or explanation which is both really faithful to the meaning in the context and suitably worded. Definitions and explanations tend to be especially bad when they are composed *impromptu*. Even in fully prepared lessons quite unpardonable mistakes on the part of experienced teachers are often to be observed. Indeed, even the ablest teacher will not compose really good glosses and notes unless he has far more time for preparing them than the average college teacher, with a full teaching timetable, is able to find.

In any case, a thousand teachers, each individually preparing notes and glosses for presentation in class, makes no sense when one good editor, or a small team of editors, could do the work and embody it in the text used by the students. Moreover, if the text is fully glossed and annotated, two very great advantages ensue: a great deal of teaching time is saved and the students can use the notes and glosses by themselves, working independently of their teacher.

In writing notes and glosses for post-matriculation students, the editor's most difficult task is that of confining himself to a vocabulary that will be understood by the average student. Researches conducted at the C.I.E.F.L. and elsewhere in India are strikingly consistent in their findings that the average matriculate, unless he has been to an English-medium school, understands, for reading

purposes, only about 1,500 of the 2,000 head-words of the General Service List, and these only in their commonest meanings. If editors cannot write the notes and glosses within the limit of 1500-2500 head-words, then we have to establish, as soon as possible after matriculation, a larger reading vocabulary so that students do not find anything strange or unknown in the new materials.

Establishing the commonest words is not easy when the schools have failed to do so; yet it needs to be done quickly. The ideal solution would be to start off post-matriculation students with a reader which carefully introduced all the head-words of the General Service List in their commonest meanings and usages. Students with a good vocabulary could improve their reading speed with the same book. The advantage of such a reader would be that every student using the book would know that any word in it he did not know needed to be learnt at once.

As for the various skills that we listed earlier one, at least, demands some special attention. This is the skill of reading fast and silently texts that are easy and familiar. Researches carried out at the C.I.E.F.L. suggest very strongly that rapid and considerable improvement in this skill can be achieved by college students taught through methods demanding no great professional sophistication. The basic methodology is very simple. Students read an easy, short passage (c. 300 to 400 words) and time their reading. They then answer objectively-scored multiple choice comprehension questions on the passage. Reading efficiency may then be measured by multiplying reading speed (in words per minute) by comprehension. (A student reading at 350 words per minute and scoring 7 out of 10 for comprehension would score, for efficiency, 245 w.p.m.)

Teachers may correct the more elementary faults which make for slow reading like pointing and muttering, but the most important part of the training seems to consist in just getting students to read as fast as they can while trying to achieve maximum comprehension, and then to record their individual performance. The practice with self-testing causes performance to improve, sometimes quite spectacularly and always considerably. The research at the C.I.E.F.L. employed the methods recommended in Fry's *Teaching Faster Reading* and the passages and multiple-choice tests from Fry's *Reading Faster*. However, it was discovered that reading improved quicker if the texts which were employed had greater appeal to Indian students, and if the Fry materials were supplemented by

reading materials which were not only more interesting but contained glosses and notes. The Fry passages and tests were constantly used, but not so much to teach as to test. They have the great value of being of reasonably uniform difficulty, and so are dependable for measuring progress.

A reading course conducted within the syllabus of the first post-matriculation year can safely be expected to more than double reading efficiency. One very interesting phenomenon that the graphs of reading improvement display is that, in the average scores of a class, improvement in speed is regularly matched by improvement in comprehension. This might conceivably be a two-way process, with the sharpening of attention created by the attempt to read fast causing comprehension to become sharper. Whatever really happens, the agreeable fact has emerged that the speeding up of reading does not cause comprehension to suffer: it actually benefits comprehension.

A beneficial side-effect of the reading improvement was an increase in the willingness of students to read for pleasure easy texts outside the syllabus. Once a student at school or college takes to reading in English as a recreation, the most important battle in reading will have been decisively won.

While speed is desirable for recreational reading, and for the quick revision of difficult but familiar texts, speed training has little place in training for the initial reading of difficult academic texts, packed with exact information and closely argued. Fullness and accuracy of comprehension are the requirements here. There is no room for misunderstanding or half-learning in certain kinds of materials—for instance, those relating to an exact science or technology. Practice in close reading, accompanied by rigorous questioning, is the right training for this kind of reading. Searching questions should lead students to look at a passage more closely and discover more meaning in it than they would do unaided. In this way, the arguments and causal relations in an exposition can be perceived, and the sequence of events in a narrative sorted out. This activity is conducted briskly and imaginatively.

An important aid to independence—more accurately, a necessity of independence—is a suitable dictionary and the ability to use it. The student, especially the student with a long way to go in the learning of English as a foreign language, needs the help of a dictionary very badly, and he will need training and assistance in

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using it. One great problem for a teacher, at almost any level, is that of choosing a suitable dictionary.

There is a good range of English (unilingual) dictionaries in the O.U.P. catalogue alone, from the small and inexpensive *Progressive English Dictionary* to the multi-volume, vastly expensive *Oxford English Dictionary*. For college students, in spite of the rather intimidating title, the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* is likely to be the best choice. Although its defining vocabulary is not systematically restricted, it is just about as simple as human ingenuity can make it, and pictures and diagrams not infrequently supplement the definitions. Its great merit is its flexibility. Common words, of the kind covered by the less advanced dictionaries, are defined, as in the less advanced dictionaries, by equally common, or even commoner, words. Less common words, unlikely to be encountered except by the reader who has progressed so far as to understand fairly large vocabulary, are defined in a wider vocabulary.

Even the *Advanced Learner's Dictionary* is not as comprehensive as the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, which is designed for the native user. For example, a relatively easy, unsimplified text prescribed for the first-year degree students of an Indian university contains the expression 'gamma rays'. A definition will not be found in the *Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, but there is one in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*. Moreover, the C.O.D. definition, as one might have expected, is all in words clearly defined in the A.L.D. Provided students have ready access to a reference library containing copies of the C.O.D. and other standard reference books, the A.L.D. is a dictionary which can serve them well through all their years of undergraduate education, and even beyond. Besides, it has other uses too. It is a good pronouncing dictionary, and the brief notes on syntax are helpful in composition.

It is well known that the examination system determines, to a very large extent, the kind of reading that students and teachers will engage in. If examiners set questions which can be answered from memory, rather than from the close understanding of the reading texts themselves, students will use all their ingenuity in trying to anticipate such questions and producing memorized, rehearsed answers. These answers are certainly no measure of the student's real competence in reading. There are two factors in the situation which render such a test of reading invalid and unreliable. First,

the examination does not demand first-hand reading and understanding of the actual texts. It only requires prepared and memorized answers. Second, by assessing proficiency in written expression as a measure of proficiency in reading comprehension, such an examination invalidates itself completely.

In order to improve this situation, which only encourages the extensive use of 'notes' and 'guides', the structure of the question paper testing reading should be modified to include at least the following features:

- 1 The questions on reading comprehension should primarily (and, if possible, exclusively) be tests of reading and not of written expression. The factor of written expression should not be allowed to vitiate the marking. As far as possible questions should be such as require a minimum of writing.
- 2 The 'paper' should consist of several short-answer questions instead of a few general, stereotyped questions requiring the writing of long, pointless essays. Similarly, to ensure *validity*, *reliability* and *coverage*,^{*} increasing use should be made of skillfully devised multiple choice questions.
- 3 The question paper must include test of comprehension of 'unseen' material. This is undoubtedly the most valid test of reading. Passages for this purpose should be drawn from books not prescribed but comparable to the prescribed books in subject matter and complexity. Two or three such passages representing a variety of styles and subject matter should be included. The length of the question paper—such a paper may run to several pages instead of the conventional one page—should not deter us from carrying out the reform.

The incorporation of these changes, we believe, will produce a salutary and far-reaching effect on the teaching and learning of the skills of reading. Besides, they will ensure a valid and efficient method of testing the skill.

* See chapter 19 for an explanation of these terms.

TEACHING THE PROSE TEXT

The traditional mode of instruction in colleges is the lecture, delivered to the class as a whole. Some teachers justify this on the ground that it saves time, and ensures that all the students in a class receive uniform instruction. They feel the students ought to listen first to the lecture for a general comprehension of the subject matter, and later go to the texts for close reading and greater clarity of understanding. However, as the process of learning varies considerably from student to student, it is doubtful whether these claims can be sustained. What can be accepted is that a great deal of ground can be covered by the teacher in a single lecture; whether his students can also cover the same ground is uncertain. In any case, the lecturer is more concerned with his subject than with his students. A lecture can sometimes be an exciting experience, and a small number of listeners may even get inspired to study the subject deeply; but most of the students can hardly benefit from the experience of listening. Very often they turn to such sources as 'bazaar notes' for the comprehension of the subject matter. It is also common knowledge that the students demand 'notes' of their teachers. The lecture is a medieval invention, designed for the serious student who was too poor to buy books or had no access to a library; he had no choice but to listen to a scholar who was lucky enough to have read the books! Education in the modern world is very different. It is carried on, by and large, through what may be called 'guided reading'. Although the lecture as a mode of instruction might have been useful in the past, the present context of our college education makes it unnecessary and ineffective. In the western countries, in comparable situations, lectures are falling from favour and are being supplemented by demonstrations, tutorial work, projects, student-centred activities, seminars, individual instruction through graded exercises, programmed instruction, and so on, which are found to be more effective as they emphasize student involvement in the learning process.

In teaching a prose text to a college class, one may well begin with the question: What is being taught through this book? If the

objective is merely to put across the informational content of a passage, then the age-old method of lecturing is as good as any. But if language learning is a matter of skills, and not the mastery of facts, then both the lecture mode of instruction and the dictation of notes must cease. If the aim in any teaching of skills is to give the maximum amount of practice to the learners, then it follows that the teacher should talk less and get the students to work more. The more time the teacher takes up, the less time the students will have for practice. The teacher should so plan his lesson that the student will have enough time to think, to talk, to read and to write.

The first thing, then, is to plan the lesson carefully. There is no need for it to be in rigid and formal 'steps'. It should be elastic, dependent upon the specific needs of the class, the language items to be taught and the particular experiential background of the students. Even so, a general plan for college classes is shown here. Such a plan should have the following features:

- 1 Exposing the students to some amount of language experience. (This may take the form of a carefully planned introductory talk or oral exposition of the subject matter in the prose passage, based on known vocabulary.)
- 2 Study of the text (exposition, followed by questions and answers to ensure comprehension).
- 3 Study of sentences in the text which are realizations of important structures known to cause difficulty.
- 4 Written work, followed by checking.
- 5 Blackboard work. (The blackboard should be used to focus the attention of the students on key sentences in the passage and important vocabulary items. In some classes it may be necessary to write a good outline or even a brief summary of the main items presented on the blackboard.)

The teaching of a prose passage involves teaching all the new vocabulary items and structures, teaching comprehension, and using the passage to stimulate the student's own skills of expression and composition.

As already mentioned, an anthology of essays is usually prescribed. Very often, the pieces selected are overloaded with allusions, local references and technical or foreign words. Students have to work through such material with little motivation or interest. The subject matter, the situation, the vocabulary and the constructions belong all too often to an age that has passed. No matter how care-

fully one filled in the background and explained the situation, it would still be beyond the reach of the students. Establishing vocabulary items like *dame* and *recrudescence*, for instance, is a waste of time, since it is difficult to find use for such words in modern speech or writing.

But the teacher may not be in a position to refuse to teach an unsuitable text. If any essay runs to, say, 24 pages, has all kinds of allusions, makes use of incomprehensible jargon, outmoded vocabulary and structures, and if the time allotted for teaching it is only two or three periods of about fifty minutes each, the teacher may not know what to do! (The example cited is a real one. The essay in question was a selection from Emerson.)

What the teacher should do in such a case is to select and simplify. He should select only the items which are worth establishing, and spend some time on these. He should not attempt to do what is clearly impossible—teach everything that the passage contains. The teacher should ignore a great deal of the passage which may have little relevance for the student from the linguistic, cultural or even the plainly utilitarian (examination) point of view. He should recount the main ideas (in a controlled vocabulary), ask questions relating to them, get the answers from the students and develop a neat outline or, if necessary, a good summary on the blackboard, and drill the important structures and vocabulary items. Unfortunately, college teachers have a tendency to explain everything. The philosophical ideas and cultural elements of a civilization buried in the deep past, for example, may not be of interest to an average undergraduate. A college lecturer should be willing to give up much that is irrelevant in relation to the student's needs, however much he himself may be interested in it.

Simplification is a very useful technique. It helps students comprehend the passage or text that is being taught. Also, the teacher uses familiar words and structures in his simplification and the repetition of these items in a meaningful context tends to fix them in the minds of the students. It is possible to explain fairly difficult and complex ideas in terms which are meaningful to the learners. The technique has the merit, moreover, of making the students feel that the text was explained to them clearly. Experience has shown that where the essays are unduly long or contain difficult matter, simplification can be highly effective. Key sentences from the original passage should be given attention, so that the students get

the satisfaction of knowing everything that is important in the text.

Comprehension of the passage can be tested by asking questions. (Students should be selected for questioning randomly and not in a predictable sequence: this keeps the class alert, as everyone has to be in readiness to answer.) Questions may be of two or three types. The first may require the student to locate the answer in a given paragraph and to read it aloud. The second type should test comprehension of a deeper kind. The answer to the question may not be found in the passage itself, but may have to be inferred from a sequence of sentences or ideas. The third type should test some kind of critical evaluation of an idea, situation or episode. The questions should be evenly distributed throughout the class so that every section of the class—strong, average and weak—may get a chance to participate actively in the learning process. The questions should generally be short and pointed and should exclude those requiring 'yes' or 'no' for an answer. They should be thought-provoking and should lead the students, step by step, from the obvious to the implied. Sometimes, classes may be far too large for the satisfactory use of this technique and every student may not get an opportunity to answer. In such cases a variant of this technique can be tried. Students can be asked to write down the answers, quickly, in their notebooks. Then a few can be asked to read them out. This has the merit of (a) making every student think and attempt to answer the question, and (b) enabling him to check the answers given by his fellow students.

Vocabulary expansion is one of the major objectives in any language-learning programme. In making a list of the vocabulary items to be taught, some kind of selection would be necessary. If a passage contains, say, 98 new words and if the teacher gets only 2 or 3 periods to teach it, then obviously all the new words cannot be taught. The teacher should make an assessment of the number of words that can reasonably be taught during the time allotted. In the final selection two kinds of words should be included: (a) words that are of specific use in the understanding of that particular passage, and (b) words that are of general use in the language. It is not simply a matter of consolidating what the student has learnt but of adding to it and enlarging his vocabulary. How exactly is the student to be helped to add to his stock of words? It is not enough to give him just the meanings of words: a dictionary will give him these. The right way to teach vocabulary is to use words

repeatedly in significant contexts. No one can learn a word at the first encounter. It has to be met in several contexts and as many times as possible. The teacher should use the words in meaningful contexts, and they become meaningful only when they are related to the experience of the students. The teacher has to think of such examples as have their roots in the students' own limited experience. He should also encourage students to use the new words they have learnt in sentences of their own, which can be written on the blackboard for visual reinforcement. Insight into word formation should be developed by choosing apt examples, and drawing attention to prefixes and suffixes.

Any time spent on the teaching of grammar is justified only if it helps in the formation of correct language habits. Grammatical rules, as items of knowledge, are not much help in themselves; structural tables are. They instil correct habits without increasing the learning load. However, some grammar must be taught. No one can be expected to learn a foreign language accurately through a process of unconscious assimilation alone. At any rate, if the pace of learning has to be quickened, conscious, intelligent habit formation appears to be necessary. Again, any grammar taught must be related to the amount of language the students have already mastered. Since students' knowledge of the language is limited, the grammar should also be limited. Teachers should draw up a list of minimum requirements in the area of grammar for each class and ensure that errors committed in those categories are completely eradicated.

Grammar should not be taught in isolation. The teacher can collect a large number of sentences illustrative of the grammatical principles to be taught from the textbooks prescribed for detailed study. The students, it is assumed, are familiar with these sentences. These examples may be put up on the blackboard and the students asked to describe their features. The teacher should explain the principle, as far as possible, with the help of statements made by the students themselves. This technique has the merit of evolving a grammatical rule from the language experience of the students. Once a rule is evolved or the significant features of a construction recognized, students may be asked to locate similar sentences in their texts and later, to produce sentences of their own on the same pattern.

In understanding a prose text, the most important skill—or set

of skills—that has to be developed is the skill of silent reading. Some questions should be asked in advance, and the students required to read specific lines, or a paragraph, silently, in order to find the answers. If they are merely asked to read a paragraph as a routine task, they may go through the paragraph aimlessly, without any purpose. If, on the other hand, they are asked to read for the definite purpose of finding answers to questions put earlier, the activity becomes both purposeful and meaningful. There should also be some pressure of time. This technique, by repeatedly sending students to the text, serves three purposes: (a) it ensures comprehension of the specific item in question; (b) it develops the habit of quick, silent and purposeful reading; and (c) it familiarizes the text. The teacher should resist the temptation of supplying the information himself and send his students to the text to *search* for the information. In the beginning a few lines or short paragraphs may be read, but as students get used to this technique, the length of the passages to be tackled should be gradually increased. Home-reading assignments should also be set, but the advantage of using assignments in the classroom is that it can be done within a stipulated time. This pressure increases the speed of reading.

In addition to quick silent-reading assignments in the classroom, students should be encouraged to read a specific number of pages at home and come prepared to answer questions which will test their comprehension in some detail. A broad indication of the areas in which questions may be set should be given to the students in advance to motivate their reading and give direction to it. Students should also be encouraged to read other books to understand allusions, particular episodes or situations in their text. The teacher should direct them to read a specific chapter or a certain number of pages in order to find the relevant information. Such reference work should be carefully planned and the books recommended for such reading should be made available in the library on a separate shelf. Where possible, regular sessions for reference work should be arranged. All this is calculated to lead the student to efficient independent reading of all the texts that may interest him, or be useful to him, in the study of his subjects.

It is possible to learn a language without a course book. We learn our mother tongue without one, and thousands of people learn even foreign languages without using a printed text. However, the course book is economical. It presents material to which a learner can

always return for further practice. It selects those features of the language which are essential, and presents them in a graded manner. It introduces material which a skilled teacher can use as a nucleus around which to build language skills. The material in the book is useful only in so far as it promotes efficient language learning. If the teacher makes the mistake of identifying himself with the textbook, language teaching recedes to the background and the story or the essay becomes all important. This should not be allowed to happen, and the textbook should be used primarily for improving the language skills.

A textbook should contain materials that are interesting, informative and thought-provoking. By the time the student comes to college, he will have read in his own mother tongue, and possibly also in English, about many things that are familiar to him from his environment. The college course book should lead him on from this known material to the unknown, and widen his horizon of thought and intelligence. Students of this age group would perhaps look for stories of adventure and discovery, of scientific exploration, of strange peoples and customs, of values and ideals which enrich human life, and so on. Most course books are dull because the selections they contain have nothing to do with the needs of the students and do not appeal to them. For example, an account of climbers negotiating difficult mountain terrain at high altitudes may interest a small minority of students interested in mountaineering, but would leave the bulk of the students cold. The teacher may have to spend a lot of time studying maps of the region being described, so as to explain to his students what it is all about. This can be a depressing exercise. Students should find joy in reading a text and comprehending the main 'message'. If a piece is interesting, students enjoy reading it again and again, and a good teacher can always motivate them to discover features which may not be obvious at the first reading. These can be discussed in the classroom, giving the students an opportunity to express themselves orally. Later, written exercises can be set. In this way, a course book can be used to extend the experience of the learner.

Instead of attempting to present the whole panorama of English writing from the seventeenth century onwards, college course books should provide specimens of twentieth-century prose—direct and straightforward.

Analyses (carried out at the CIEFL) of several college textbooks

in use have shown that sometimes as many as 98 new words occur in a single prose passage, to the teaching of which the teacher can hardly allocate three periods of about 50 minutes each. (The number of 'new words' was computed on the assumption that a college entrant knew the 2000 words of the *General Service List*. But this assumption can be wrong.) It is difficult to comprehend a prose passage without understanding most of its vocabulary. Editors of textbooks should, therefore, select passages in such a way—it is quite possible to do so—that the vocabulary load is not needlessly heavy. Even so, it is useful to provide a glossary at the end of each lesson so that the students can quickly get the meaning of new words. (The difference between a glossary and a dictionary is that in the former the meaning of the word is explained in the context in which it occurs, whereas the latter tries to list all the possible meanings of a word.) The glossary facilitates smooth and intelligent reading.

At the end of each passage, a textbook should contain language exercises of various kinds. The first of these is the vocabulary exercise. The exercise should be so designed as to help the student in the acquisition of new vocabulary encountered in the lesson. There should be exercises on word-building. Attention should be drawn to prefixes and suffixes and students asked to identify them in words encountered in the text material. There may be structures in the passage, the mastery of which is considered desirable. Such structures should be identified. Exercises based on them should be constructed, so as to (a) bring about an awareness of the grammatical principles at work in them and (b) promote in the student the ability to produce sentences of the same pattern in his speech and writing.

There should also be comprehension questions of various kinds to help the student understand the main impact of the passage.

Lastly, there should be composition exercises based on the content of the text material. They can be of various types. The student may be asked to develop an outline into a short essay of two or three paragraphs; or, he may be asked to reconstruct the story on a slightly different basis. He may even be asked to write on something different from what he has studied in the text, but which is thematically linked with it.

TEACHING POETRY

In this section we are going to offer a few observations which may *appear* to contradict what was said earlier.

It was said, for example, that the kinds of texts generally used for teaching English at the college level may not be very suitable for imparting to students essential language skills. College syllabuses still have a distinct literary bias: essays, belles-lettres, fragments of biography or fiction, some drama and a handful of much anthologized poems are almost inevitably prescribed. Presumably, one of the intentions is to 'expose' the student to samples of the best English, so as to improve and enrich his ability to use the language.

From a language teacher's point of view, such a strategy is not indefensible. We can learn quite a bit of a language by just being exposed to it. True, the skills of language grow most efficiently when the learner is able to practise them actively and systematically, but even passive exposure to language has some value. Patterns of the language—words, phrases and even sentences—heard or read in some context or other, may linger in the memory and, after a period of incubation, pass over into our own productive use.

So little is known of the processes by which human beings learn languages that it seems a pity to exclude from the teaching system any 'method' which might conceivably assist in the learning of language. About the use of literary texts as a language teaching device, we could reasonably say: they cannot form the only basis for a language teaching programme, but a place should be found for them in any comprehensive programme beyond the elementary stages.

So far, we have not even considered the other benefits, real or supposed, resulting from the teaching of literature: its educative, cultural or humanistic value. We are confining ourselves, for the time being, to literature as *language* (in which form it can be an aid to the learning of language). We are tempted to suggest that where literature has failed in assisting the learning of language, it is at least partly because people have lost sight of the fact that literature *is* language before it is anything else.

Today, many teachers have accepted, at least in principle, the primacy of language skills in the teaching of English. There is, unfortunately, a tendency to view the whole business of learning (and teaching) English in unduly simplistic terms, to look for simple solutions to problems which are basically complex. Some people are often fascinated by catch-words which have no real validity. One of these shibboleths is the replacement of all 'literary' texts by 'language based' texts (which, presumably, means texts specifically intended to provide practice with pre-selected grammatical patterns and vocabulary). Some people, one suspects, may have developed feelings of guilt about teaching 'literature' in the English class, and are now anxious to atone by repudiating anything that might seem even faintly literary!

In this crusade for 'language', one of the first targets of criticism is poetry. There are teachers who now maintain that poetry can have no place in second language teaching, that a student struggling with the elements of English structure should not be exposed to the complexities of poetry. Two arguments, commonly advanced, are stated below:

- 1 Poetry can 'mean' nothing to a student who has only a rudimentary understanding of language, and therefore exposure to poetry leads only to incomprehension, bewilderment and frustration. Alternatively, since the student is compelled to accept whatever interpretation of a poem his teacher chooses to thrust on him, exposure to poetry can only encourage mental laziness and habits of uncritical acceptance or rejection. In either case, the results are pedagogically unhealthy; there can be no benefits from such an exercise.
- 2 Since poetry frequently employs words and syntax in a manner that would not be considered normal or acceptable in ordinary communication, exposure to such usage, *before* the student has mastered normal usage, can lead to the formation of wrong language habits. Attempts have been made, for instance, to trace back some errors frequently occurring among African students to premature exposure to Shakespeare!

The substance of both these arguments is: poetry represents a different kind of language use from the one commonly associated with communicative functions. Since the learner does not generally encounter such use of language, there is not much point in giving him practice in it; teaching time (which is limited) can be better

utilized in giving him what he does need, which is plentiful practice in the use of normal language in normal situations. It is not that people have anything against poetry, but that they feel poetry can wait until the basics of language have been learnt.

There is considerable force in this argument, but it could be turned back against itself. The reason for wishing to teach poetry is precisely that it is not prose, that it does not function in the same way as prose. There is no point in using poetry for purposes which could be served through prose, for prose can almost always serve such purposes better. Poetry should not, for example, be used to develop the skills of comprehension, or to provide drill with the structures of English and teach essential vocabulary; these can be done more effectively by using prose, which is why (as we have said already) the prose text forms the core of the language-teaching course. It cannot be said, either, that poetry provides the student with a model of language which he may consciously or unconsciously imitate in his own use (this could rather be an argument in favour of exposing the learner to good prose). Basically, we wish to teach poetry because it provides the student with a kind of linguistic experience that is not otherwise available: an experience of a different kind of language use, which is creative and imaginative, and can achieve more total communication through a fuller utilization of some of the resources of language, such as the ambiguities and overtones of words. Such experience, at least for the learner of language, is largely *passive*—but that does not make it useless. Though it is no substitute for active learning, it can be a desirable complement to it. On the whole, therefore, our sympathies are with those who have clung stubbornly to poetry, though often for reasons which are different from those we are discussing.

Some of the opposition to poetry stems from the way it is taught. A very common practice is to preface the study of a poem with introductory remarks about the poet, his life and times, his contribution to literary history, etc. At the undergraduate level, it is not usually necessary to talk about the poet or the background to the poem, unless something in the poem absolutely demands these references.

It is often argued that giving the students some information about the poet, or relating the poem to its tradition, adds to the understanding and enjoyment of the poem. This may be true, but there are good reasons why the teacher should not launch upon a lengthy

and scholarly introduction to the poem. In the first place, is it a waste of classroom time to give the students factual information *about* a poem which they could also obtain from a book; it would be much better to give them the references to consult if they felt interested enough to do so *after* reading the poem. The desire to know more about a poem should arise out of the experience of the poem itself. In India, the teaching of English poetry has meant, too often, the retailing of available information as a substitute for the study of the actual text. At the undergraduate level, at any rate, we should make it clear that it is the text which matters. Furthermore, at this stage, the teacher cannot, or should not, attempt to exhaust all the possibilities of a poem, to squeeze out of it every drop of significance. It is quite enough if the students begin to see something of the possibilities!

Teaching a poem should not consist in paraphrasing each line, glossing each word, analysing each image and finally wrapping the poem up neatly into a 'central idea' or 'message'. The main justification for teaching poetry at this level is that it provides enjoyable experience of language. This means, first, that the language of the poem is at least as important as the 'content' which it presumably conveys; second, that the poem should be an experience, to be felt, not merely talked about; third, that the experience should be enjoyed. Too often, the poems selected for teaching are those which contain recognizable 'morals' (exhortations to patriotism, virtue, industriousness, etc.). Even when a poem is not obviously didactic, there remains a tendency to emphasize the content. The teacher's interpretation of what the poem is about becomes a substitute for the poem itself, whereas it should serve only as an aid in making the students go to the poem and discover it for themselves. The poem has to be preserved intact as an experience, to be apprehended through several channels at once: the visual, the auditory, the tactile, the intellectual, the emotional, etc. Nothing destroys the experience in the poem as effectively as too much explaining. This tendency to explain too much may be due to the unfortunate manner in which the examination 'tests' what the student has learnt from the poetry class. The usual '*Explain with reference to the context . . .*' question, or the equally popular '*Attempt a critical appreciation of . . .*' question, tends to reduce a poem to a bald statement of some kind, and to make the grasp of details more important than the response to the total experience. It is doubtful whether response

to a poem can be tested in a summary manner; but the requirements of the examination do make the student (and the teacher) feel that everything that is 'examinable' in a poem must be explained. Poetry works not through the explicitness of language but through its suggestiveness; there should not, therefore, be too much emphasis on meanings, on exhaustive understanding and grasp of detail.

The teacher, we have suggested, should be as much concerned with the language of the poem as with its content. He may have to point out the special uses of language in each poem, or talk about the conventions attached to such use of language. Here again, he must remember that the kind of response he can expect from his students at this stage can only be elementary. There is no need, therefore, to burden them with technical information concerning metrics, prosody, rhetoric, etc. The most that the teacher can hope to achieve is to make his students feel something of the 'poetry' in the poem. How this is done cannot be indicated in a few, simple 'steps'; nevertheless, here is the sketch of an approach that may be more useful than the traditional one of lecturing on the poem.

We have said already that the poem should be thought of as an experience, to which the student has to be led. Too much of 'teaching' destroys or dilutes the experience; on the other hand, *some* teaching is necessary, so that the difficulties which prevent the student from reaching the experience can be removed.

The difficulties can be linguistic, cultural, or 'intellectual'. If the student encounters too many new words (or patterns), or if he is confronted with cultural elements or ideas in the poem which are unfamiliar or complex, he is likely to miss the experience in the poem. The teacher has, therefore, to familiarize the class with the language items or the part of the content which he judges to be essential for a proper 'understanding' and enjoyment of the poem as a whole. This has to be done before the students are asked to tackle the poem itself.

The introduction should always be as economical as possible. The teacher should not appear to be telling the class directly what the poem is all about. If the students are once made to expect that the teacher will 'explain' the whole poem to them, they will not be in the proper frame of mind to read the poem themselves and to make the effort necessary to 'discover' it. The teacher should not, therefore, set up any such expectation; it may be advisable to avoid expressions such as 'I am going to teach you a poem . . .' ('We are

going to read a poem . . . ' is much better.)

Some teachers begin the teaching of a poem by isolating all the difficult words, writing them up on the board and glossing them. It may occasionally be useful to gloss a word in advance, but it is not desirable to tear every word out of its context. In glossing a word, some context has to be provided; this applies also to the part of the content which has to be introduced. A suitable 'framework' has to be found, therefore, in which to incorporate all that the teacher may want to say about the poem before it is read. The problem is to make the introduction interesting enough to make the student want to read the poem and find out what is in it.

When we talked about 'reading', we emphasized the importance of reading silently and fast for purposes of comprehension. Normally, there is not much point in reading aloud from a text: this does not give the students useful practice with the important language skills. But in the teaching of poetry, reading the poem aloud is a rather essential element. Poetry is meant primarily to be heard, and even when it is being read visually, the 'echo' of the sounds which it contains is present with the reader. (In the rapid reading of prose texts for comprehension, it is this echo that we wish to inhibit.) The most striking effects of poetry are achieved through sound. A good reading of a poem is worth at least half the lesson. Teachers who are required to teach poems should be trained in the proper and effective reading of English poetry. This requires, above all, a familiarity with the rhythm and tones of the English language. Poetry in the Indian languages is commonly meant to be recited or chanted, and the rise and fall of the voice in such poetry is significantly different from the normal patterns employed in speech. This is because 'stress' does not play a significant part in most Indian language's and important elements in the meaning of an utterance are signalled through 'intonation' (changes in the level of the voice). In the rendering of a poem, therefore, a good deal of variation in 'pitch' is usually involved. When a speaker of an Indian language reads a poem in English, he tends to make use of the patterns of reading poetry in his own language. As a result, the poem tends to become unduly dramatized or exaggerated. English poetry is usually intended to be spoken, rather than recited.

For this reason, it is difficult to read an English poem effectively unless one is familiar with the sound systems of spoken English. One also needs to be familiar with certain special conventions about the

use of sound in verse, which introduce variations from the normal speech patterns of English. It is not possible for us to explain here precisely how a poem in English is to be read aloud. It is best for the teacher to listen to recorded readings of well-known English poems, to try to observe the rhythms and intonation patterns used, and to imitate them as far as possible. If the teacher is not confident of his own ability to read a poem effectively, he should not attempt to do it. He may use either a recorded reading in the class (this is often difficult to arrange), or a live reader (a student, perhaps) who is known to be efficient. If neither of these can be done, the teacher should merely ask his students to read it silently. Students should never be exposed to a bad reading of a poem!

It is good practice to read the poem aloud once to the class, asking the student merely to listen to the poem, with all texts put away. There are several advantages if the first impact of a poem is purely auditory. We want the student to form a first impression of the poem as a whole before he looks at the details. If he is to receive an effective first impression, he should be able to get the essential, elements, uncluttered with distracting details. When a student first encounters a poem by listening to it, there is a likelihood that he will receive only the most striking, and possibly the most essential, elements; the details are filtered out. This 'filtering out' of details is not achieved if the student is asked to follow the poem in the textbook as it is being read out to him: his eyes take in too much.

To confirm that the student has received an initial impression from listening to the poem, the teacher should ask him a few general questions which probe his reaction to the poem as a whole. It is here that the theme of the poem, and its tone (cheerful, sad, etc.) are established. If the student has missed the essentials, the teacher can lead him to them.

At this stage, the students should follow the text visually while the poem is read aloud a second time. They should have formed, at the end of this reading, quite a good impression of what the poem is about and what it is 'trying to say'. If the teacher finds that even at this stage the poem means nothing to his students, that it leaves them totally unconcerned, he can assume that the poem is probably not a suitable one.

Sometimes, the clue to the 'meaning' of a poem may lie in the use of a particular grammatical pattern, which the student may miss. For example, Kipling's poem *If* achieves much of its effect

by making delayed use of the conditional structure introduced by *If*! The student may fail to see the structure and its implications until he has had a chance to look at the poem as well as listen to it.

Once the student has an over-all understanding of the poem, the significant details will fall into place and 'fill in' the picture. Quite often, the poem will, in fact, register in his mind as a 'picture': visual elements in poetry are often most easily grasped. For the teacher, therefore, a useful way of stimulating response is to start with what is most visual and 'concrete' in the poem. But the teacher's activity should consist in shaping, rather than dictating, response—in suggesting, rather than telling. By inviting students to form mental 'pictures', the teacher can draw attention to the way in which sounds contribute to the picture (e.g., the effect of the *t* and *b* sounds in '*Tiger, tiger, burning bright . . .*').

In discussing the logical structure of the poem too, the teacher should only suggest to the student how words are used to build up an idea and how 'key-words' can function in setting up a theme, even if it is not explicitly stated. Poetry consists very often in indirect or oblique statements, or patterns of contrasts created by the use of words and phrases used symbolically to evoke certain associations. The student has to be led to the discovery of these patterns (of words, images, sounds, etc.) through questions which suggest the answers that he is expected to arrive at.

In poetry (and, in fact, in all close reading of text material), the important thing is to make the student go back again and again to the poem, by asking him questions which can be answered only through a scrutiny of the text. Some of them can be of this type:

- 1 'In which line (or lines) of the poem does the poet try to say . . .' (the teacher puts into his own words the 'idea' that he feels the lines convey).
- 2 'Which words in the poem tell you that the poet is trying to say . . .'

The questions asked should not test merely whether the student has understood what the poem is about: his understanding should include also an awareness of *how* the poet is able to say what he wants to say. But first, there has to be a tangible 'meaning' which the student can use to build up the more subtle kinds of understanding. The teacher should help the student arrive at this meaning by integrating the answers to the various questions asked by him. The

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'summing-up' of the poem should serve to bring into focus all the elements in the poem which he has been trying to identify and highlight.

Above all, the teacher must appear to be enjoying the poem, or else he will never be able to induce enjoyment in the student. The best teachers of English always manage to infect the student with something of their enthusiasm. It is because the enjoyment of poetry can be infectious that we wish to teach it.

REMEDIAL TEACHING

We have already said that at the college level one of the important tasks before the teacher is making the student first unlearn, and then re-learn, quite substantial chunks of the language which he had learnt wrongly earlier. We shall have more to say on this in the section on Grammar; for the present, we offer only a few general remarks.

There are three things a good language teacher must do:

- 1 *introduce* (initiate) new material and new skills;
- 2 *practise* all material and skills already introduced;
- 3 *remedy* all defects in the learning of material and skills already introduced and practised.

If (1) and (2) were performed ideally, we could expect that learning would be perfect, and (3) would be unnecessary. But even under the best of teaching conditions, students do misunderstand and mislearn, and therefore (3) is always necessary. The conditions for the teaching of English at pre-college levels in India being very far from ideal, there is very substantial need for (3).

At the college level, there is not very much of initial teaching to be done (apart from introducing the special registers). There should therefore be much more emphasis on practice, but, as we have seen, this is not always possible. The result is that students are constantly *adding* to their stock of language which has been badly or inadequately learnt.

What are the causes of defective or inadequate learning?

There is bound to be some amount of speculation here, since one cannot enter the learner's mind to observe what goes on. The probable causes of wrong learning are discussed below.

(1) *Interference from the learning of the first language(s)*

We tend always to make use of that which we know to learn that which we do not know. Languages differ so widely in their phonological and grammatical systems that applying the knowledge of the first language to learning a second leads frequently to wrong learning. For instance, the learner invariably replaces the sounds of the target language by the sounds of his own language which

seem to resemble them. This applies also to the learning of grammatical patterns and relationships and, less frequently, of lexical items.

(2) *Wrong inference, or analogy*

The learner tends to generalize on the basis of whatever he has learnt, and apply the generalization to new learning situations. Sometimes the generalization is appropriate, in which case it proves to be fruitful and helps the student in learning faster; but quite often the generalization is inappropriate, and leads to a wrong inference. Unless this is pointed out to the learner immediately, the inference arrived at remains with the student in the form of incorrect learning.

For example, a student learning the plural forms of English common nouns may generalize for himself the rule: 'If there is more than one, add -s: *boy, boys; book, books*; etc.' He applies this generalization and produces '*man, mans; foot, foots*;' etc.

Errors resulting from (1) and (2) are usually systematic and regular and, to some extent, predictable. But there may be other errors, arising from what we might call 'sheer muddle'—confused learning, bad teaching, poor memory, etc. These errors are without any systematic pattern.

Once an error has crept in, it grows stronger with each repetition; the more one 'practises' a thing wrongly learnt, the harder it is to unlearn it in favour of the correct thing. This is why remedial teaching is more important than initial teaching or practice at the college level.

The teacher should locate each error in the student's learning, and take steps to eradicate it. How can this be done?

The average college entrant commits at least one error in each line of a composition. Usually, the conscientious teacher will run a red pencil through each error, or put a circle around it, and write something in the margin to help the student correct himself. Some teachers use a kind of code for labelling each kind of error: '*sp.*' (spelling) or '*gr.*' (grammar) being common terms. Sometimes one may attempt to supply the correct form of the word or phrase or even sentence. Eventually one may find oneself re-writing the entire composition; but the student is usually left no less puzzled regarding the precise nature of his error.

This kind of correction would be effective if the teacher could go over each script with the student who produced it, discuss every

mistake, and make him use the correct form until it became entrenched through practice. This, however, is impossible.

So he must, as we have said already, bring some order to the bewildering number of individual errors by classifying them into categories. This is where the linguist can help the teacher, since the latter has analysed the language into regular patterns of different kinds. The more systematic these patterns, the more useful they could be to the teacher. This is why a teacher trained in linguistics and working within the framework of some linguistic model can produce a better classification than another teacher who merely catalogues the errors in an *ad hoc* way and ends up with a hundred or more 'kinds'.

Again, regrettable as this may be, the teacher will have to concentrate on a few categories and ignore the rest: all teaching at a higher level must be selective. The teacher may decide to confine himself to the more common errors, on the basis of frequency; but obviously this cannot be the only criterion.

In a project for remedial teaching, an experienced teacher* decided to cut down the number of error-patterns to only ten:

- 1 spelling
- 2 punctuation
- 3 verb forms (errors in basic verb morphology, e.g. 'taked')
- 4 tense and aspect (e.g., 'He has gone yesterday.')
- 5 prepositions
- 6 pronoun forms
- 7 agreement (verb with subject and pronoun with its referent)
- 8 word order
- 9 articles
- 10 vocabulary and idiom.

(All errors not falling into these ten categories were simply labelled 'unclassified'.)

Some teachers may feel that this categorization is too broad: for example, Indian students are so prone to say things like 'Why you didn't go?' or 'He's coming tonight, isn't it?' that errors in the forms of questions, and in question tags, may form two special categories. Furthermore, the errors may occur at one of several levels: that of the morpheme, the word, the clause, or the sentence. Errors may affect different constituents of the sentence: e.g., the Noun

* D. Y. Morgan: 'A Discussion of Remedial Teaching' in *ELT Selections* No. 2, ed. W. R. Lee, O. U. P., 1967.

Phrase or the Verb Phrase. There may be items omitted, or red in-
adantly used (e.g., 'That man who is just coming in he is my brother'),
or wrongly used. One may find that one needs to take these things
into account.

One locates errors by going to free composition produced by
students: when he writes in a natural and un-selfconscious manner
the student reveals the flaws in his learning, but if he becomes aware
that he is being tested in some particular area of the language (for
example, if he is asked to supply the missing prepositions in a sen-
tence) he may not give us an accurate understanding of his problems.

The next problem is to decide how to deal with errors. Many
teachers feel that intensive practice in areas in which errors occur
can provide the necessary learning: for example, if the student is
confused in his use of articles (using the wrong article, dropping
the article where it is necessary, or inserting it where not necessary),
he can be taught to use them correctly by giving him a lot of prac-
tice with sentences in which the different patterns of use are illus-
trated. The student is given a model, which he practises (e.g.,
'Examinations are always troublesome, but the examination we
had last month was a torture') by imitating; the use of substitution
tables provides this kind of practice.

Journeys	are	often	interesting
Mountain climbing	is	always	tiring
Work			

but the	journey we went on	last	month	was exhausting.
	climb they did		year	
	work she undertook		week	

Since the student can produce a grammatical sentence each time
merely by reading from left to right, he gets practice in using the

pattern correctly but not in using it incorrectly. With sufficient reinforcement, the correct habit is formed and the error remedied.

There is obviously an underlying principle in the use of the definite article in the sentences above, which could be stated in the form of a rule ('Plural count nouns or non-count nouns do not take an article unless specified by the context'). Now, an important pedagogical issue arises: Should the rule or grammatical principle be given (explicitly) to the student when he is asked to practise the pattern? If so, what should be the order—practice, rule, practice; or rule, practice?

This issue will be taken up in the section on Grammar, but we should realize that the error may be due to one of two reasons:

- 1 the student has no rule which could tell him whether to use the article or not; he therefore does so in a random manner;
- 2 he *has* a rule, but it is wrong.

'Behaviourist' teachers would argue that rules do not enter into the student's performance: he performs correctly if correct habits have been formed, and incorrectly if they have not been formed. If there is an error, it merely indicates lack of the practice necessary for forming the habit. But the fact that some errors show a consistent underlying pattern while others do not, indicates that learners do give themselves rules in some areas, while other areas remain rule-free.

The implication is clear: where the error is due to the application of a private, incorrect rule, remedial teaching should supply the correct rule and the practice; where the error is rule-free (unsystematic), remedial teaching may or may not supply the rule, but it must supply the practice.

Is there any advantage in supplying rules where ('it appears') the student has no rules for himself?

There are conflicting opinions here. Several teachers (influenced, no doubt, by Behaviourism) maintain that it is the practice, not the rule, which accounts for correctness. Native speakers of English use articles correctly even when no rules are taught them. Most people use language without realizing that there are underlying rules; only a few exceptional ones are interested in the rules. The bright student who has a special interest in the operation of languages may find rules interesting or useful or even necessary; the average student will not require them. Rules cannot be a substitute for practice; they may be used, optionally, as aids to practice.

The modern grammarian seems to believe, however, that all apparently rule-free use of language is, in fact, rule-based. If the student seems to have no rule, he may be groping for one, and the teacher should help him by providing the rule. So, rule and practice will be more useful than practice without rule.

As for the question, 'Should the rule follow or precede the practice?' there can be no clear answer. Psychologically and pedagogically, it may be better to let the student infer the rule for himself, inductively; but clearly such inferences are not always possible because the rules of language are often arbitrary and not based on logic. The rule, in such cases, would have to be given, before the practice could follow.

There may be another reason for preferring rules before practice. In the earlier stages, the student has learnt (with or without the assistance of rules given by the teacher) how to use the language without making a conscious effort to find the correct thing to say: this is what a native speaker can do, and this automatic control over language is the ideal that language teaching aims at. Unfortunately, the automatic control applies to language incorrectly learnt as well as to language correctly learnt. One produces one's errors as unconsciously as one produces the correct forms.

Where there are errors, the teacher will have to break the habit, interrupt the pattern of unconscious use and replace it by some kind of self-conscious behaviour, which may again turn into a habit after long practice. Let us say, the student has regularly been saying '*I am having a headache*' (for '*I have a headache*'). This may be due to mother-tongue interference, wrong generalization, or plain muddle. The student has to be informed that he has formed a bad habit, and that this is an area where he must be careful. ('Some verbs simply do not permit the *-ing* form, so *watch out!*') What the teacher has done is to attach some kind of warning or danger signal to a particular area of the language, so that in future the student is forced to stop and think: 'Now does this verb have an *-ing* form or not?' At first, he has to wait for quite some time before he finds the answer, which is not what we normally want, but with more practice, the answer comes immediately, and he begins to use this group of progressive forms correctly and rapidly.

What we have to say about remedial teaching is thus substantially the same as what we had to say about language teaching generally: control of the correct forms comes through steady, directed practice.

THE TEACHING OF GRAMMAR

College lecturers are now often required to teach English grammar, and most of them resent this because they feel it is something which should be left to the school teacher. Many of them are not sure of their own knowledge of grammar, and they do not see how they can possibly teach something so dry and mechanical to large groups of insufficiently motivated students. Teaching the prose or poetry text, they feel, is bad enough, though it does, at least, offer something for the lecturer to talk about. But how can any intelligent person grow eloquent over 'anomalous finites'?

Normally, when one thinks of the grammar class, one remembers the dreary sessions at school when one had to memorize rules, paradigms, definitions, etc., provided by Nesfield or some other minor prophet. Teaching this horror to today's students would be unimaginable.

There is some confusion over the term 'grammar' itself. As used in the context of language teaching, the word has several connotations:

1 'Grammar' is the total mechanism which a language possesses and employs to enable its users to communicate with each other. (To avoid confusion, let us call this Grammar₁ or G₁.)

Every native speaker of a language, literate or illiterate, knows and controls its G₁; without this, he would not be able to communicate.

Each language possesses a distinctive G₁ peculiar to itself, although some linguists maintain that the G₁s of all languages, though superficially different from each other, are the same at some deeper level.

2 'Grammar' refers also to the formal analysis and description of G₁. (Let us call this Grammar₂ or G₂.)

The illiterate native speaker of a language knows its G₁ but not its G₂. However, the moment he begins to think about his language consciously, begins to wonder how he can get a message across, he is involved in G₂. ('Yesterday I seen two mongooses—or should that be mongeese?')

What traditional grammarians provide is the G₂ of English. Each

writer produces his own G_s , which is his account of, or his interpretation of, the G_i of the language.

3 'Grammar' refers also to the rules for correct use of a language, which may be prescribed for its users. (Let us call this Grammar_s or G_s .)

A Grammar (G_s) of the kind produced by Nesfield consists largely of rules which a learner is expected to master. But some modern grammars (G_s) merely describe the *facts of the language* instead of prescribing rules. This leads us to distinguish between a descriptive and a prescriptive grammar: between G_d and G_s .

Obviously, each language has rules which permit even our illiterate native speaker to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable sentences ('No, not "I wants a piece of bread"—"I want"'). These rules are present in the G_i of the language, and a G_s should describe or state them. But from time to time these G_i rules may change: there is nothing inevitable about them, and they are merely *conventions*.

Languages are constantly being exposed to influences that produce change, but there is also something in languages that resists change. Thus, there may be certain changes in the G_i conventions which become totally acceptable ('It's me'), some that are only marginally acceptable to some speakers ('I want that the Government should do this'), and some that remain unacceptable ('He's aging, isn't it?'). A good G_s should take note of all this, but a rigid G_s (such as Nesfield's) would reject all these changes.

(4) There is also a fourth connotation of the word 'grammar,' used in recent linguistic theory. So far, we have used 'grammar' to refer to something that exists in language, or to our own attempts to describe this 'something'. But 'grammar' is also being used now to refer to some innate capacity which all human beings possess, which allows them to acquire and to 'generate' language: in this sense grammar is a property of the human brain rather than of language. (We will call this G_A .)

Now, the question is: which 'grammar' is the teacher expected to teach?

Every teacher of English must ultimately teach the G_i of English, since this is what enables a student to use the language. No matter what one is teaching in the English class, if he is using the language correctly and making his students use it correctly, he is contributing

to the teaching of G_1 . The Professor of Poetry is also teaching G_1 , though he may not realize that he is teaching grammar.

What the 'grammar lesson' teaches, however, is the G_2 or the G_3 of English. Does the teaching of G_2 or G_3 help the student in learning G_1 ?

The Indian situation seems to provide a ready answer to that question: many of our students know a lot of G_2 or G_3 (this, at least, is what their marks in the school examination indicate), but they can neither speak nor write correctly; their G_1 is poor. On the other hand, a student could certainly be made proficient in G_1 without any exposure to G_2 or G_3 . This is what happens with native speakers, and could happen with a student who is able to learn in the same way as a native speaker, that is, through constant exposure to the language.

If the teaching of G_2 (or G_3) does not ensure the learning of G_1 , why is it persisted with? This is partly a hangover from the scholarly tradition, which emphasized the study of grammar (G_2) as a discipline; and it is partly a failure to distinguish between G_1 and G_2 .

It would not be true to think, however, that all teachers are happy about this. In fact, the reaction against the teaching of G_2 and G_3 has gone to the other extreme: in many cases, teachers are warned that they should 'teach the language, not *about* the language'.

This new approach emphasizes, as we have already seen, the practice of language in meaningful situations: oral drills, pattern practice, substitution exercises, etc. The student is systematically exposed to G_1 (Functional Grammar) by the teacher, and he absorbs as much of it as he can. At the initial stages of learning, there is no attempt to make the student think consciously about language, or to provide explanations of any kind. Formal grammar (G_2) is rigorously excluded, as it is believed that explanations will only confuse the young learner who does not possess the maturity to benefit from them. After several years of learning, when the learner has gained sufficient control over G_1 , it is felt that he may be exposed to some formal teaching of grammar (G_2), as this will help systematize and consolidate what he already knows of G_1 . (This is by no means considered necessary by everyone.)

At this stage, the exponents of the new approach maintain, the kind of G_2 selected for teaching should be carefully considered. The Nesfield type of grammars which, rigorously prescribe rules (many of which are no longer valid), or which provide explanations or

categorizations drawn from Latin and in no way applicable to English, should be replaced by more modern scientific grammars based on current linguistic research.

The teacher is often told that 'traditional' grammars are useless; but unfortunately there is, so far, no scientific grammar available which could describe or explain *all* the facts of English. However, attempts are being made to produce the 'perfect' grammar—and now grammarians are making use of whatever they have learnt about G_4 (the natural human property leading to the acquisition of language) to produce a satisfactory 'teaching' grammar.

The current feeling is that an adequate G_2 should explain to the learner what happens in a language, and provide rational insights into the process of communication as well as the process of language acquisition. It is not the business of G_2 to prescribe rules, and its business is not over when it has catalogued the observed facts of a language.

Hitherto, some teachers have been very emphatic about one thing: not even the best G_2 can really ensure that the student learns G_1 . The answer has been to provide more and more of practice, without wasting time over formalizations.

But, as we have been emphasizing, we are less sure today that we really know how language is acquired. There may be good reason to believe that the learner of language is not simply a robot who can be put through his paces mechanically. Each learner may be a miniature grammarian, trying to construct his own private G_2 out of whatever he observes in the G_1 , and constantly experimenting with the G_2 that he produces for himself.

In any case, it is unrealistic to hope that the Indian learner can get enough practice in the use of English G_1 to be able to absorb it, as a native speaker does. There isn't enough English around us for this to happen. The teacher will have to compensate for the lack of practice and provide a short-cut to the learning process. This is where an explanatory, insightful G_2 can help. However, the G_2 has to grow out of the G_1 : the explanations and insights are derived from the exposure to language. (This is what seems to happen with the native child too.) We can only generalize on the basis of what we experience.

Usually, grammar (G_2) is taught and examined in isolation from all other parts of the language course. The teacher puts away the textbook, and confines himself to explaining and illustrating what-

ever is found in some teaching grammar which may be fashionable at the moment. Grammar is even separated from composition; in the grammar class the teacher merely provides the rules for correct writing; the actual production of writing is left to the composition class. There is thus an unwarranted divorce between the theory and practice of G_1 .

This approach to the teaching of Grammar (G_2) is linguistically unsound and pedagogically undesirable. Grammar does not exist in isolation from language: language is grammar. The objective in teaching grammar (G_2) to the ordinary student is to improve his receptive and productive language skills—to make him a better user of language—and not to give him a lot of specialized information about language. Such (G_2) as is taught should only be incidental to the teaching of the language skills. The grammar lesson must emerge out of the language material which is being used to teach the other skills. The course book, or text, which is being used to develop the skills of reading and comprehension, and of vocabulary, should also form the basis of the grammar lesson.

What we are advocating is the use of a text-based grammar. Grammars of the Nesfield type, or even more modern grammars like W. S. Allen's *Living English Structure* (used in many schools and colleges) have one great disadvantage: the examples given to illustrate a grammatical point are uncontextualised, and therefore unrealistic. An awareness of grammatical phenomena develops only when language is used in proper contexts. Furthermore, the language material (corpus) used to illustrate a grammatical principle should be related to the student's experience of language; and in the Indian situation, the student may have no other experience of the English language except that provided by his textbook (and the teacher). So it is important to make use of the reading text for introducing grammatical explanations, etc. In fact, the 'grammar' (G_2) which may have to be introduced for pedagogical expediency should be woven into the prose lesson: devoting a separate hour for the teaching of grammar alone may not be desirable. (There cannot be any general rule, of course; what may work in one situation may not succeed in another.)

A question which arises here is strictly that of methodology: should the teacher provide the explanations or analysis first, or should he let the students infer the grammar from the text? (We have tried to discuss this in the section on *Remedial Teaching*.) Peda-

gogy seems to favour the heuristic, inductive approach (from experience to inference)—but again, the student may need a more direct form of grammar teaching, especially at the college level.

The teacher should select passages from the text which can be analysed to illustrate certain grammatical principles. He has to decide in advance what part of the grammar he wishes to discuss, and usually the basis for this is the known deficiencies of the students (revealed, perhaps, by error analyses). Let us suppose the teacher wishes to go over the grammar of the tense system in English. The problem may, for example, be as follows:

- 1 Excessive use of the present continuous tense (even in places where the simple present would be more appropriate). This may be due to interference from the mother tongue, or to bad teaching; sometimes the continuous tense is overtaught in schools as it is convenient for 'situational' teaching.
- 2 Confusion between the simple past and the present perfect, the simple past and the past perfect.
- 3 Confusion between different forms of expressing futurity (*will/shall, going to, etc.*).

The students do *not* need an exhaustive description of the tense system of English. They need to know only the basic facts, to help remove the confusions they might have. Grammatical explanation should be accompanied by plenty of illustrations, and these should be from a contextualized passage. So the teacher must find a passage, preferably from the text, which brings out the contrastive use of (for example) the Simple Present and the Continuous ('I generally walk home from college but now I am driving home'), the present perfect and the simple past, etc.

Grammatical patterns should always be introduced, if possible, in contrast with other patterns, rather than in isolation.

It may be difficult to find a text suitable for illustrating all the uses, especially the contrastive uses, but the teacher should be able to adapt, rewrite, or even compose a suitable passage. After this is given to the students the teacher must make sure that it is totally comprehensible to them. He may, if necessary, use the passage for comprehension before he exploits it for grammar. The important thing is to make the student read the text carefully: in this respect the grammar lesson is no different from any other.

The teacher then draws attention to each pattern that he has already selected, explaining the principle(s) involved, in not too

technical a language. (There is no need to fight shy of 'labels' such as *noun*, *subject*, etc. If these terms are introduced meaningfully, they are generally acceptable; and the advantage is that they permit the teacher to explain things more precisely.)

There may be some advantage, in certain situations, in using the mother tongue to *explain concepts* which are difficult or abstract. The mother tongue must, however, be limited to explanations offered by the teacher. The actual practice of language must be in English.

After the grammar has been explained and illustrated, the learning must be reinforced through exercises (introduced in contextualized passages, as well as in isolated sentences for greater 'sharpness'). The student may also be invited to construct a passage similar to the one used for explaining the grammar. Finally, the lesson should be recapitulated for the main grammatical points.

As we have seen already, the major reason for introducing grammar overtly is to provide remediation: there is not much 'new' grammar to be taught, and more 'consolidation' (by practice) of language skills already badly learnt in school is likely to be harmful rather than beneficial. Here, there is something to be said for supplying rules directly and converting bad language 'habits' into conscious, rule-based behaviour. The teaching of grammar must even be very largely prescriptive.

The purpose of teaching grammar is, of course, to induce basic grammatical correctness: but this is not all. There are degrees of grammatical skill, just as there are degrees of ungrammaticalness. Usually, merely being able to say (or write) a thing correctly is enough; but sometimes it is necessary to be able to say the same thing differently, using a different syntactical arrangement. For example, 'We want a holiday' and 'What we want is a holiday' are both grammatically correct, and both convey the same information, but the effect each produces on the hearer may be different. The 'message' contained in the sentences 'It was Lal Bahadur Shastri who signed the Tashkent Agreement', 'Lal Bahadur Shastri signed the Tashkent Agreement', and 'The Tashkent Agreement was signed by Lal Bahadur Shastri' may seem identical, but there are important differences in emphasis. This may seem to be a problem in the area of style rather than grammar, but there is perhaps no reason to separate the two. The teaching of grammar may shade into the teaching of composition; the first is concerned with the

organization of messages in sentences, and the other, with larger units than the sentence. Here again, there are degrees of skill involved, from the purely mechanical to the conceptual.

In the next section we shall deal with the teaching of the higher skills involved in writing.

THE TEACHING OF COMPOSITION

Writing has occupied an important position in the curriculum of schools and colleges all over the world for centuries. However, it is the one skill that has not perhaps received as much attention as the others. The developments in psychology and linguistics during this century stressed the primacy of speech in language learning. Consequently, listening and speaking received considerable attention from the teaching profession and they preceded reading and writing. (In fact, a time-lag was advocated between the teaching of the spoken and the written skills.) Next in importance came reading. There is no doubt at all that the vast majority of our students need to develop principally the skills of reading. While this is so, it is a fact that the *assessment* of any academic programme depends almost solely on writing. This is true even more of our country than others. Yet it is strange that the teaching of writing is not being given the prominence due to it. It is assumed that if systematic training in the other skills of language is imparted, writing will take care of itself. Most people tend to ignore the fact that highly accomplished speakers and readers often find it difficult to express themselves adequately when writing even in their own language. How much more difficult should it be, then, to be able to write in a foreign language?

Our experience finds expression in language through either speech or writing. Speech organizes the flux of experience, makes sense of it and conveys it almost spontaneously when we are carrying on a conversation with someone. The flow of language is motivated by an eagerness on the part of the speaker to explain to another person the meaning of experience as he understands it. Almost every sentence in his speech is prompted by a motive, conscious or unconscious. In all these ways, writing differs from speech. The only thing that is common to both speech and writing is the substance of the experience which has to be expressed in meaningful groups of words and sentences. Writing differs from speech in that it is a leisurely activity and not a spontaneous one. It is, therefore, essentially reflective in character. Unlike speech, it allows plenty

of time for us to think over our experiences, carefully organize them in a sequence and satisfy the requirements of logical coherence. While in this respect it has an undoubted advantage over speech, it lacks, to some extent, the propelling force of motivation which makes speech spontaneous. Motives for writing certainly exist but they are so far removed from immediate needs that the writer has to make considerable effort in order to discover them and be prompted by them. The main reason is that while in conversation we have to make quick responses to someone before us, in writing this person is either absent or so far removed from us that for all practical purposes we seem to be communicating with no one in particular. This situation renders writing more difficult as a mode of communication. The direction of speech is determined by the responses of the listeners. Questions, expressions of doubt, disagreement or approval determine not only what should be spoken next, but also how it should be spoken. In writing, however, communication becomes more or less an intellectual and impersonal activity because the person communicated to is absent. Speech and writing, then, not only structure our experience differently but also express it differently.

In the context of the classroom, the activities involved in writing should thus be different from those of speech. The time allotted to these activities should also be different. If provision has been made at all in a college timetable for writing, it is usually a one-hour period. It is hard to visualize any worthwhile practice being given in such a short period. We would favour a two-hour period since, as we have already observed, writing demands reflection, and this needs time.

In order to write with ease and confidence, students should get repeated opportunities of doing so. This is possible only when their experience can be expressed in concrete terms. The teaching of writing is a complex process involving many activities such as the initial probing into experience, the analysis of it, the listing of items of specific and definable significance, their subsequent organization into a meaningful sequence and finally their expression in language that is both appropriate and competent. A majority of our college students, we believe, belong to an age group that offers little resistance to the successful tackling of these problems. They have attained the required maturity of mind. The major stumbling-block in their attaining proficiency in writing seems not so much the inability to

think as the poor control over the foreign language. Competence in writing, then, depends upon two factors: control over the experience to be communicated and control over the language, chiefly at the level of syntax.

The first of these can be tackled by devoting sufficient time to a thorough discussion of the subject matter eventually to be written about. Students should be encouraged to talk over ideas and exchange opinions and impressions without any inhibition. In a relaxed atmosphere students can think and answer questions put to them by other students or by the teacher. If dividing the class into small groups helps this activity, the teacher should not hesitate to do so, assigning one aspect of the subject to each group. A leader can be elected for each group, who will later report to the class as a whole. In most cases, the subject matter itself helps to determine whether it is better to divide a class into small groups or carry on the discussion in the large class. If students do not know how to take notes, they should be given a brief course in efficient note-taking at the beginning of the session. They should then be encouraged to take notes of the discussions held and the conclusions reached. Preparatory work of this kind is extremely useful in giving students adequate control over the subject.

The teacher can make use not only of the direct and first-hand experiences of his students, but also of experiences encountered through reading. Students may be asked to write about what they have read in their prescribed textbooks. This should not, however, result in the mere copying of the printed text. The students can be asked to reproduce a story from a point of view different from that of the writer, or to narrate the story in the words of one of the characters. They can be asked to rewrite the story, altering a certain sequence of events. The events of the story may be so changed that the class has to imagine a totally different ending. The story may also be rewritten as if narrated by some natural object, such as a river or a tree which might figure in the story. The texts to be used for this purpose need not, of course, be confined to the English course books alone.

Even after the teacher has helped his students in organizing their ideas successfully, they will need his help in selecting and organizing the language in which to express these ideas.

Writing is a skill which must be taught systematically. Although the proposition may appear to be deceptively simple, it remains true

that we learn to write by writing. If students have not mastered the basic grammar necessary for composition, it will be necessary to provide practice in the use of a few selected sentence patterns. Substitution tables, intelligently constructed and used, can help them not only with syntax but also with the vocabulary required for a piece of writing. Students can be given a sentence frame with slots into which words performing the necessary structural functions have to be inserted. If the lexical variants are carefully chosen, they can get abundant practice in the construction of sentences, all of which are correct and acceptable. Students must be led gradually through graded exercises in selected areas of grammar. The exercises set should give them an insight into the arrangement of words within a particular structure and also give them plenty of practice in using it.

From sentences we move on to paragraphs. It is not enough if students are told that a paragraph is a group of sentences forming an independent unit and that each sentence in a paragraph should help to develop or support an idea contained in the topic sentence. They should get practice in recognizing the topic sentence in a given paragraph and in developing paragraphs from given topic sentences. They should learn that 'development' involves giving particulars and details, examples, comparison and contrast, analogy or a short illustrative story. Topic sentences from paragraphs in a good prose passage should be carefully selected and the students asked to study the methods employed by the writer in developing these paragraphs. Similar sentences should then be given to students for practice in paragraph construction.

An essential aspect of teaching writing is accuracy. Students should be trained to observe meticulously and carefully what may at first appear to be minor details, such as punctuation and spelling. After completing the assignment, students must be asked to go through their writing carefully, looking for inaccuracies. We consider revision an extremely valuable exercise which, by repeated practice, should become a habit.

Correction of written work has always been a problem even for hardworking teachers, because of large classes: the load of work can become intolerable. All the same there are many teachers who conscientiously point out every mistake that a student has made, by some kind of notation in red pencil. If the mistakes are many, though, the page of writing is covered with red marks which

leave the student frustrated and depressed. He is unable to assimilate the numerous corrections made and is almost certain to repeat the same mistakes in the next assignment. The purpose of correction should be not so much to point out the number of mistakes that have been made as to improve the writing of the students. What we have to do is evolve a method which gives the most help to the student while lessening, at the same time, the burden of the teacher.

For this reason, we suggest short writing assignments rather than long ones. It is better to give practice in writing a small number of correct sentences at one sitting and to gradually increase the frequency of such assignments than to give one long assignment once a fortnight or so. Perhaps a short paragraph of about 100 to 150 words should be assigned. Even here it should be possible to devise what may be called 'self-correcting' exercises. The teacher reads out the correct answers and students note their mistakes and correct them.

Not every assignment can, however, conform to this type. In such cases, the teacher should be less ambitious and confine himself to a few major types of errors. Even these may take several weeks (or months) to eradicate. It is impossible to make the students realize at once the mistakes that they make and to eliminate them overnight. This demands slow and patient work with suitable remedial exercises. It is a good idea to make the student, after a short lapse of time, rewrite something he had attempted earlier, trying to avoid the mistakes he had initially made.

It is important, as in every other type of learning, that the student should not only improve his writing, but also be made to feel at every stage that he is making satisfactory progress in the acquisition of the writing skills.

EXAMINATIONS IN ENGLISH

One of the clichés of our time is that examinations are inefficient. Every educational failure is blamed on them, and the criticism is repeated at regular intervals by committees and commissions. Unfortunately, there is a lot of truth in this often repeated criticism, as we will presently see. But strangely enough very little is done to reform examinations. Most educators and administrators concerned with conducting them, though aware of the harmful influence they exert, seem to be helpless, and are indeed so unsure of any kind of change that they do not take any concerted action for effecting an improvement.

Our discussion of the problem of examinations will be brief and specific. We realize that examinations in English have to be viewed in the larger context. Suggestions for radical reforms in isolation will obviously be unrealistic. Our plans for reform must fit into the physical machinery and the existing procedures and conventions which a university employs to conduct its examinations. We think it possible to formulate a modest and practicable programme of change and to implement it in a phased manner with determination and conviction.

In this chapter we shall briefly discuss:

- 1 the requirements of a good, purposeful examination;
- 2 the glaring inadequacies of the present situation; and
- 3 suggestions for the gradual introduction of some viable reforms.

The new view in examining language attainment differs from the present general practice in that it is more specific about what is to be examined. In the preparation of better examinations the first consideration is not how to test but *what* to test. As such, a precise formulation of the objectives of the English programme is necessary. The objectives have to be clearly defined in terms of the skills and knowledge that students are expected to possess at the end of the course. Also, if possible, the relative weightage and importance to be given to each skill or item of knowledge should be indicated.

The examination should be so planned as to measure the extent to which students have developed these skills.

To serve its purpose, objectives must be meaningful to the student and must be viewed by him as attainable; they should be clearly reflected in the examination. In order to give direction and coherence to the teaching-learning process, they must be stated precisely and realistically. As is well known, the examination requirements are the be-all and end-all of all educational effort. If the examination does not test a certain skill (oral proficiency, for instance), students neglect it in spite of all the emphasis that the teacher may place on it. Examination requirements define, in a very real way, the course objectives for the students. Quite obviously, then, objectives for the course of study and the examination must be in accord, so as to release incentive and ensure purposeful effort.

The statement of objectives should guide editors of books, boards of studies as well as setters of examination papers. These objectives define the degree of excellence with respect to the various skills and indicate the range of vocabulary and grammatical constructions to be mastered. In other words, they indicate the desired terminal behaviour to which students should have progressed from an assumed entry behaviour.

However, it is common knowledge that university syllabuses do not indicate the objectives which a given course of study (and therefore the final examination) is to serve. This and other drawbacks of the present examinations will be examined in the next section. Here we shall confine our remarks to the requirements of a good examination.

A good examination has the following characteristics:

1 It is *valid*; that is, it measures what it claims to measure. Validity is the relevance of the examination. For instance, an examination in comprehension is valid if it measures the skills of comprehension to the exclusion of the skills of written expression, such as productive use of structures and vocabulary, spelling and punctuation. The degree of validity is derived from (i) a meticulous analysis of the content of each question and the 'paper' as a whole, and (ii) an adequate coverage of the course of study.

2 It is *reliable*; that is, it measures consistently. If the same examination is given twice to the same group of students, the performance of each student should show little variation; in other words, marking should be stable. Reliability is necessary for validity,

because an examination which does not yield dependable scores (marks) does not measure what it claims to measure adequately or validly. It must, however, be remembered that reliability refers only to the precision with which the examination measures. A high degree of reliability does not by itself ensure validity, though for validity, as has just been pointed out, reliable scoring is essential.

Are our examinations valid and reliable?

It does not take one long to demonstrate that the examinations in English today are neither reliable nor valid; and by not being valid they have a pernicious effect on teaching and learning. Indeed, the entire English teaching operation is vitiated by the examination requirements which have little relevance to the assessment of desirable language skills. This is not to say that they are adequate tests of literary knowledge or appreciation either. If anything, they test the candidate's ability to predict questions and provide ready-made, rehearsed answers to them. The prepared answers usually come from either the 'notes' dictated by the lecturer or the 'bazaar notes'. It is a rare candidate who dares use his own language resources and compose his own answers! Most candidates do not even bother to read and understand the questions carefully, but proceed to unburden themselves of the answers they have prepared on the general themes suggested by the questions. It should also be pointed out that even a careful reading of the questions is not of much help, since they are loosely and vaguely worded. Such questions (facetiously defined as 'Describe the universe, and give two examples') are clearly an invitation to ramble and include irrelevant, valueless chunks of memorized material.

We summarize below the reasons which are responsible for the situation we have just described.

- 1 In the absence of clearly defined objectives, there is a great deal of confusion on the part of setters of examination papers regarding *what* to test.
- 2 Rather than test what is desirable with a view to promoting language proficiency, the examiners test only what is easily tested. Traditional questions and stereotyped format are employed year after year without any modification.
- 3 The annual (or biennial) external examination constitutes the only measure testifying to the work done over a period of one or two years. This single exhibition of knowledge, this one great effort, decides the worth of the student. There is no pro-

vision for any internal assessment of his continual effort and progress.

- 4 Owing to the sole use of long essay-type questions, the coverage of the syllabus is grossly inadequate. Also, the pattern of option in a typical question paper is unimaginative and unbalanced, allowing students to leave out large parts of the prescribed course. These practices naturally encourage students to resort to 'question spotting' and selective study.
- 5 The examinations predominantly test informational content (knowledge of plots, etc.), relegating language skills to the background.
- 6 Since essay-type questions predominate, the marking is largely subjective, arbitrary and inconsistent, depending upon the individual examiner's notion of what a good essay should be like. As the variables to be assessed are not precisely defined, each examiner uses a different set of criteria for marking a question.
- 7 Instructions are vague and inadequate, giving little indication of the scope of the required answer. This adds to the difficulties of the evaluator.
- 8 The minimum pass mark is scandalously low, which encourages slipshod work. This seems to be the chief reason why students continue to make elementary mistakes right through their college career. Since they are allowed to pass the examinations despite these mistakes, they never seriously set about correcting them. The low pass mark is a strong encouragement to laziness, inaccuracy and selective study.
- 9 Little information is extracted from the examination statistics. Most of the information obtained is either ignored or discarded. There is thus little 'feedback' into the teaching programme.

Reforming a situation which is so totally unsatisfactory is undoubtedly a colossal task. However, we think a moderate plan of practicable reforms can be initiated along the following lines:

1 *Defining the objectives*

In order to achieve a measure of validity, the examinations must be closely related to and based on a clearly formulated set of objectives. These objectives must indicate, as specifically as possible, the skills of language and knowledge about English usage and English literature that students are expected to master. The point has already been elaborated in an earlier section.

Next, we have to determine the relative weightage to be given, in the scheme of examinations, to the various objectives. For instance, if we seriously believe that proficiency in spoken English is one of the important objectives, we should ensure that a proportionate number of marks is set apart for testing this proficiency.

2 *Redesigning the 'question papers'*

An adequate coverage of the syllabus is another crucial matter to be considered. Does the examination oblige the candidates to pay proper attention to all the parts of the prescribed course? Or does it enable them to ignore sections of it? Part of the answer has already been given above. The other part relates to the pattern of option to be allowed to candidates and the types of questions. Obviously the options, if any, should be well balanced and linked with alternatives of similar value and difficulty. The ideal situation is where no option is allowed. This is possible when the number of questions to be answered is fairly large, covering the best part, if not all, of the syllabus. Also, the questions should be such that they can be answered during the time allowed. This is possible only if the 'paper' includes a variety of question types—a good proportion of them being objective-type questions.

This brings us to a consideration of the various types of questions available to us. It is necessary for us to appreciate what use we can make of each of these types in order to make our examinations valid and reliable. We will briefly consider the possible uses of (i) essay-type questions, (ii) objective-type items, and (iii) short-answer/structured-type questions.

i) *Essay-type questions*: These questions are thought to be appropriate for measuring such educational objectives as coherence of ideas, organization of facts and style of expression. The candidate gets an opportunity to show his ability to analyse a subject, organize his material and project his personality.

But they suffer from several limitations. Marking of essays is known to be subjective and unreliable. An examination consisting of five long essays at best covers only a small part of the material that the candidate has studied in class and prepared for the examination. This can be very unfair to the candidate since such an examination is bound to have a large element of chance. It has already been pointed out that for this reason students resort to selective study. Several studies have shown that candidates can answer the required number of questions even after neglecting almost three-

fourths of the course. The Radhakrishnan Commission had this to say on the subject:

'The essay-type of examination which prevails at the degree stage, as elsewhere, suffers from some major defects. It has usually no clearly defined purpose; it is, therefore, invalid. Its sampling is very arbitrary and limited; it is inadequate. Its scoring is subjective and therefore not reliable.'

However, since essay questions cannot be eliminated completely, we suggest measures to make them as valid and reliable as possible.

- a The questions should be specifically and unambiguously worded so as to force the candidate to cover particular points relating to the topics. The scope and length of the required answers should also be clearly indicated.
- b Specific instructions given to examiners on how to allot marks should reduce the subjectivity and make the assessments of different examiners reasonably uniform.
- c The prevalent practice of issuing detailed instructions and moderation by the head examiner, though right and proper, should be further refined and modified to make it more useful.

ii) *Objective-test items*: Included in this category are items such as 'multiple-choice', 'true-false', 'sentence completion', 'matching exercises' and the writing out of dates and numbers. From their design it is clear that they elicit specific responses from the student. Since there is only one correct answer, marking is objective and reliable. Objective-test items do indeed overcome some other defects too of the essay-type examination that we noted earlier. For instance, since these items are highly structured, the examiner can, by including them in the 'paper', measure many of the specific skills and items of knowledge which he thinks are important. The candidates cannot then evade, as they often can with essays, some of these important problems. Also, since objective-test items can be answered rapidly, the examiner can cover a fairly large section of the course.

However, critics of these tests point out that they do not give an opportunity to the candidate to express his ideas and that the ability to compose the right answer is not tested. That constructing these tests is time-consuming and requires great ingenuity is also held against them. But the most valid criticism seems to be that the use of these tests has a harmful influence on teaching and learning. This however is not universally true. When used with intelligence

and discrimination, these tests are excellent, specially for testing comprehension skills.

iii) *Short-answer questions*: These questions combine some of the virtues both of essay questions and objective-type tests, in that the problems posed are specific and highly structured, but at the same time they provide the candidate with the opportunity to compose his own answers. These questions are far more objectively scorable than essay questions though not in as high a degree as the multiple-choice items. Thus they offer the examiner a good alternative to the other two types.

What, then, should the structure of an English 'paper' be? The specific answer to this question will depend upon the content and skills that the paper aims to measure. The purpose will determine the extent of the use of each type of question.

Taking into consideration the problems and possibilities outlined above we offer a few practicable suggestions with regard to the redesigning of question papers. It may be pointed out that these suggestions are made in the context of the present external examination framework, and to that extent are not very radical. A more far-reaching and radical programme of reform for examinations in English can be implemented when undesirable features such as mass copying, annual external examinations (instead of internal evaluation), and assessment by marks (instead of grades) are suitably tackled.

Examination bodies should initiate a phased programme of reducing the predominance of essay questions. The 'papers' should contain, according to the needs and purposes of the course content, a suitable proportion of short-answer questions, objective-type items and essay questions. Our suggestion is that the 'paper' should contain only one traditional essay-type question and several short-answer and objective-type items. This would achieve large coverage and discourage 'cramming'. If carried out, this may be the single most important reform and would explode the myth that the candidate cannot be asked to answer more than 5 or 6 questions in 3 hours.

Adequate coverage of the syllabus will also explode the other myth, viz., that questions set in the preceding year cannot be repeated. Another simple measure that would contribute to the improvement of the design of the question-paper is the specification of the length (in terms of the number of words) of the expected

answers to essay questions and short-answer questions. And it need hardly be pointed out that instructions and rubrics in the 'paper' should be precise and carefully worded. The wording should leave no room for varying interpretations either by students or examiners.

The point that tests insist on a minimum level of proficiency has already been made, but it will bear repetition. The strategy is to specify certain basic skills and the range of grammar and vocabulary which we expect our students to master by the end of a given stage. The stipulated pass mark for this restricted amount of language learning should then be fixed at around 70%. On the face of it this looks like aiming at the impossible. But on a closer examination of the proposition it will be seen that it is not at all unrealistic. What is being demanded is that all students who pass the P.U.C. and the B.A. (Compulsory English) examinations should have a near complete mastery of the fundamentals of the English language. This insistence on a high pass mark with respect to elementary language points will put an end to the kind of situation where a student knows esoteric facts about Wordsworth's life but cannot make his subject agree with its verb.

English language examining is an area where a great deal of research requires to be done. The implementation of the recommendations made in this chapter should be constantly evaluated and the findings fed back into the design of the question papers.

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